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Press Release

Journalists Sanctuary International Condemns yet another assault on Journalists by Officers of Ghana Police Service

Journalists Sanctuary International has learnt with pain, yet another unjustified assault on journalists by officers of the Ghana Police service for simply doing their work by reporting from the frontline of a peaceful protest by a handful of Ghanaians.

We condemn in uncertain terms, the unprofessional conduct of the officers involved. We also call on the Inspector General of the Ghana Police Service to initiate an independent investigation into the matter and get the officer(s) involved to account.

It is shameful that for a country that pride itself as the beacon of democracy in the West African sub region, not only are protesters intimidated, arrested and detained for exercising their constitutional right, journalists who risk it on the frontline covering same are also assaulted. The trend of brutalizing journalists by officers of the Ghana police service is alien to a constitutional democracy, a system of governance Ghana has fought for and work to perfect for the past forty years.

The tactics of Intimidation, scare tactics, and physical attack on journalists and the news media, and a regime in which citizens cannot freely embark on a peaceful protest and speak into the microphone of the news media, has a different name other than democracy, it is authoritarianism, certainly not the system of governance Ghana wants to be associated with.

Ghana has for the last couple of years been consistent at declining on the press freedom index, largely due to attacks on critical journalism by security operatives, politician(s), and members of the public who are bent on silencing the media. The blatant attacks by officers of the Ghana Police Service is yet another blot on the country's reputation, and regrettably pushes the West African nation further downward on the world press freedom ranking.

It is hard to believe that an institution that is supposed to uphold the principles of rule of law by protecting citizens and treating them with dignity and compassion, is systematically turning round to abuse, attack, and dehumanize them.

The assault on Bridget Otoo, a local Ghanaian journalist, and the BBC World service news crew, comes six years after a life-threatening assault by officers of the Ghana police service on Joy FM journalist, Latif Iddrisu. Latif is currently fighting for justice and police accountability in a high court in Ghana, and also for

his life in the US state of California where he's undergoing treatment for the broken skull and the complications he suffered when the men in uniform smashed his head with their gun.

According to Article 21(1)(d) of Ghana's 1992 Constitution (as amended): "All persons shall have the right to freedom of assembly, including freedom to take part in processions and demonstrations...."

Additionally, Ghana is a State Party to the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, article 21 of which states that

"The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order, the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others".

The conduct of the arresting police officers and whoever issued the directive to deliberately put spanners in the wheels of the protesters, and assault and detain journalists, makes nonsense of the 1992 constitution and the international covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Ghana's executive branch of government which is the appointing authority of the Inspector General of Police, and in whose interest the police displayed the usual act of heavy handedness and unprofessionalism, must encourage the police administration to desist from attacking law abiding citizens for exercising their rights, and journalists for doing their work.

That said, we at Journalists Sanctuary International urge the hierarchy of the Ghana Police Service to do the right thing in order to instill some confidence in a service that has over the years become infamous amongst the Ghanaian people, and by extending their unprofessional conduct on an international news crew, is gradually working its way to gaining notoriety at the international stage.

Journalism is not a crime.