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BUREAU DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'AFRIQUE DE L'OUEST

Book Launch:

I SPOKE FOR FREEDOM. HISTORY AND POLITICS OF THE GHANA PRESS

Contribution of Journalism to the Promotion of Democracy in Ghana and West Africa

**Remarks by Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative
of the United Nations Secretary General for West Africa and
Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA)**

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1. PROTOCOLS

2. I am delighted to speak at this book launch, as the Guest of Honor. I did not hesitate to accept the invitation when Ambassador Kabral Blay-Amihere asked me to speak as Guest of Honor at the launch of his latest book. To many of us he is simply Kabral. He has been a comrade, a friend, and a brother since our Legon days in the 1970s.

3. In this regard, today's event has a much deeper meaning than a book launch. It is also the celebration of the life journey of the man Kabral Blay-Amihere. Through his new book, **“I spoke for Freedom: History and Politics of Ghana Press”**, Kabral offers us the opportunity to appreciate his contribution to the growth and development of Ghana's democracy, particularly our fourth republic. In his own words, he was prophetic when he wrote in 1991, that *“Ghana's second liberation will come on the waves*

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of the printed word and I want to be part of the struggle to establish a viable alternative press in Ghana for all times”

4. Writing earlier in his autobiography, **“Fighting for Freedom”** Kabral describes how he used his writing and activism as President of both the Ghana Journalists Association and the West African Journalists Association to ensure that democracy will thrive in the West Africa region. This is the most significant inspiration that we must share from the life of Kabral as a doyen and stalwart of Ghanaian and West African Journalism. He was not just a Journalist. He used Journalism as the pathway to serve his people and contribute to the development of Ghana’s democracy. Kabral used Journalism to promote the respect of people’s fundamental human rights. Dear Friends, in making this observation, let me also stress that within the fraternity of Journalism, Kabral throughout his nearly 40 years in active Journalism practice, always strove for excellence and frowned

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upon and abhorred the poor standards of Journalism exhibited by some sections of the media in Ghana. Kabral through out his work, which is clearly demonstrated in his new book, has never missed the opportunity to remind Ghanaian Journalists of the importance of maintaining high standards and respecting the professional ethics of Journalism and balancing the rights to free expression with a high sense of responsibility. As P.A.V Ansaah used to say, “rights, yes irresponsibility no!” In his Journalist practice, he has never been known to be sensational, inciting people with hateful language, using insulting or intemperate language, indulging in sloppy and blatantly biased reporting. On the contrary, he has always been fair, balanced and courteous, even when he disagrees with an individual, an opinion or policy position. He has been the hallmark of a responsible journalist.

5. Even at the University of Ghana, Kabral already demonstrated his proclivity to journalism. He was involved with the

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publication of his Hall magazine, and student's publications at the SRC and NUGS levels. Those days, we also had the Students Movement for African Unity (SMAU) and Kabral was a founding member and also a major contributor to its leaflets. Little wonder that upon completion of University, he chose Journalism as a profession, becoming one of our proudest, distinguished and accomplished Journalist in Ghana. Kabral has traversed all the frontiers of Journalism: newspaper vendor, reporter, editor, lecturer, publisher, President of the Ghana Journalist Association, President of the West Africa Journalist Association, Chairman of the National Media Commission. Name it, he has done it! And with distinction and admirable humility. Today, Kabral is an icon of Ghana Journalism.

6. Kabral's book, I spoke for Freedom-History and Politics of the Ghana Press is the accumulation of nearly 40 years of his career in journalism. In each chapter of the book, the pertinent

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issues he raises, some of them several years in the past, are as important and urgent today as they were at the time he wrote them. In his career of Journalism, we see best practice in the ethics and professionalism of Journalism. A good Journalist as he has always been, he never shied away or denied his profound political principles of a Left leaning Nkrumaist ideology. He has also and this is very important, never allowed his political ideology to cloud his sense of objectivity, fairness and practice of Journalism. He has been the voice of the voiceless and in his writings, he has been constructively critical of Governments, including from his own political leaning. With the hindsight of Journalism Practice from the 1970's to the 1990's, he describes how he had good reasons to be blindly supportive of the ruling Peoples' National Party led by Dr. Hilla Limann, after all, like Dr. Limann; he was of the Nkrumaist stock. Yet he was often critical of Dr. Hilla Limann citing one particular article, *"Limann A Leader or President"* where he openly criticized the

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President at the time for describing Ghanaians who were leaving the shores of Ghana to seek greener pastures elsewhere as cowards. He has never been known to be sycophantic in his practice of journalism. And he can always disagree with one without being disagreeable.

7. In our fourth republican democratic dispensation, Ghana needs Journalists who are unbending in their principles of the good ethics and professionalism of Journalism like Kabral Blay-Amihere. This is important for the media to play a crucial role towards the continuous development and consolidation of our democracy. The issue is not about the political neutrality of the Journalist. It is more about the sense of situational awareness all the time and the application of the principles and ethics of good Journalism: balanced reporting, faithfulness to truth, fairness and objectivity. Kabral demonstrated this well and remains an inspiration to the younger generation of Journalists. In his roles

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as President of the Ghana Journalist Association in the past, and now as Chairman of the National Media Commission, he has often reminded Journalists of the State Media Houses that they must at all time exhibit complete non-partisanship in how they write and communicate stories. They work for public institutions and must be fair and inclusive of all shades of opinions. Equally, he has reminded Journalist of the Private Press that even where they are politically partisan, they must exercise fully the ethics of Journalism which demand fairness and an equal opportunity for all to be heard, including political opponents. It is only through such practice that Journalists can contribute to the Promotion of Democracy rather than dividing people and contributing to intolerance and hatred.

8. In celebrating the Journalism career of Kabral, I need not overemphasize that while our current democratic dispensation is vibrant, with a wide scope of political awareness and citizen

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engagement in our politics, we have also become increasingly intolerant of one another with a widening political divide that often exacerbates political tensions to unacceptable levels of political violence and intimidation even within political parties.

9. On a day like today, when we celebrate the career of a fine gentleman who has served his people and country well through Journalism, his professionalism and untiring efforts to build national unity and peace puts us to the test. How do we sustain and deepen our democracy in order to maintain and preserve our unity, peace and stability? The critical question is, what type of Journalism is predominant in Ghana today? Is it the Journalism that is enlightening, knowledgeable, educative, and informative and holds all of us accountable to democratic values in the interest of our dear country? Or is the Journalism that divides, generates hatred and deepens rancor and bitterness or even incites acts of impunity and violence. In Kabral's career, journey

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and profession as a Journalist, we see a great Ghanaian Story Teller who used the pen to be forthright in advocating for justice and freedoms. He contributed to build society in promoting democracy at the time we were all searching that path of a united democratic state through consensus building, peace and stability. I know many Journalists and indeed all of you at this event will read Kabral's book; **“I spoke for Freedom, History and Politics of the Ghana Press”**. I recommend all of you to read this book. More specifically, I recommend that all our Journalists read Kabral's book but with introspection about their own practice of Journalism in Ghana today. While you read this book, you need to reflect on your own career. Ask yourself, as a journalist, are you helping to promote and develop Ghana's democracy or are you denigrating our democracy through the sort of Journalism that does not respect the ethics of the profession?

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10. Allow me to use this platform to make two appeals. The first is on violence in our politics. There is no place for violence in democratic politics. That is why I welcome the calls for disbanding of political vigilante groups. The Ghanaian Security Services, based on their past performance in election years, operations in internal conflict zones, and experiences acquired in UN Peacekeeping operations in conflict countries have the capacities and capabilities for adequately securing the electoral process and providing personal protection to candidates for electoral office. Our Security Agencies are adequate to this task. Boko Haram in the North East and, before them, the Militants in the South-South of Nigeria are both political vigilante groups, which grew out of control. Let us get rid of these political vigilante groups before they grow into monsters we cannot control.

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11. My second appeal is about the gender issue. Both the NDC and the NPP have now completed their primaries. Regrettably, the level of female representation in the next Parliament is not likely to see any improvements given the outcome of the primaries. In fact, it may worsen. We are most likely to see fewer women in the next parliament. This is one area in which Ghana does not provide democratic good practice. We must challenge ourselves and come up with creative and innovative approaches to get more females to political and other decision-making levels.

12. Journalists have, no doubt played an important role and continue to play that role in contributing to build the nation and strengthen our democratic culture. I recognize many shining lights of the Ghanaian media in the audience. Thank you for being unsung heroes. Towards the end of 2016, Ghanaians will go to the polls to elect their representatives to Parliament and

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also to elect a President. Journalists and the Media in general will be expected to demonstrate professionalism with respect to your own ethics to contribute to credible and peaceful elections. You must avoid inflammatory and inciteful language likely to foment rancor or even violence. Use your medium to educate about Party platforms, policies and programs.

13. So far the only contentious issue is around the integrity of the voters register. The UN has sought to provide technical support to the electoral commission to enable it have a full appreciation of the issues at stake. The most appropriate way to handle such a contentious issue such as this is through dialogue and wide consultation. We therefore encourage the deliberative and measured steps underway to resolve this issue.

14. Let me assure you that just as we have done in the past, the United Nations stands ready to support and compliment all the

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ongoing efforts to ensure that the elections in 2016 are conducted transparently and that they are peaceful. As the Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) and the Special Representative of the Secretary General [SRSG] for West Africa, you have my assurance that I will use the good offices of the UN Secretary General and the good will of the International Community towards Ghana to support all efforts for the successful organization of the 2016 elections in Ghana. At the end of it all, we want Ghana to demonstrate once again that it is indeed a reference and good example of democratic elections.

15. My good friend and brother Kabral. I join so many people, your colleagues, your family and our Ghanaian compatriots in thanking the Almighty God and all who made it possible for you to contribute so much in promoting Ghana's democracy and more specifically, to be part of the struggle to establish a viable

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media landscape. You stand tall as a distinguished son of our land in this effort. Today, we can talk about a truly vibrant and vigorous alternative media, a development that distinguishes Ghana as a reference African democratic state. Indeed, Ghana is now referred to as one of the African countries with the freest media. We must appreciate and thank people like you for your contribution to this effort.

16. And I thank you all for your kind attention.

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