

**Remarks by Ambassador Michelle D. Gavin
World Press Freedom Day
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Limkokwing University**

As prepared for delivery

- It is a real privilege to join you today.
- Every year at the beginning of May, the world celebrates the fundamental principle of press freedom and we highlight the importance of the press in providing timely and relevant information to the public.
- At the same time, we recognize the vital role of the media in holding governments accountable and we honor journalists who endure oppression, persecution and even death in order to provide to the public an accurate and objective description of the day's reality.
- This is important in Botswana, and it is important across the world, so I am particularly pleased to be with you today to celebrate World Press Freedom Day.
- A free press and the open exchange of ideas are critical to safeguarding and promoting human rights and democracy.
- Governments must protect the right of the media to operate freely, but as with any human right, its protection requires constant vigilance.
- There have been some improvements in press freedom in the last year, such as Burma's release of journalists from custody.
- But you do not have to look very far to find examples of constraints to press freedoms: from journalists detained in China to last week's news of a television reporter murdered in Honduras.
- Disturbingly, 18 journalists have been killed in Honduras in the last three years—the highest rate in the world.
- By some accounts, press freedom around the world is retreating.
- The Committee to Protect Journalists reports that nearly 180 journalists are currently detained around the world, up from 120 in 2001.
- Despite these challenges, media activity is having a positive impact, especially through the use of social media and new technologies.
- It was only eighteen months ago that social media began to reshape the Middle East and North Africa.
- You don't need me to recount how social media campaigns went "viral," accelerating street protests and political change.

- This year’s official celebration of World Press Freedom Day is currently taking place in Tunisia, to commemorate the historic changes of 2011.
- As we try to grapple with this changing world, it is clear that media is often not a passive bystander, but rather can be a catalyst for social and political change.
- Furthermore, a combination of social media, mobile phones and satellite television now connect us across borders, breaking down political, cultural and social barriers.
- These changes continue to add pressure for media to improve their journalistic standards, and for governments to listen to their people.
- But as 21st century technologies broaden the reach and impact of media, they also pose new threats to free expression through censoring and digital surveillance.
- Although the tools of media are changing, the fight for freedom of expressions remains as urgent as ever.
- In the United States, the rights to free speech, freedom of the press and peaceable assembly have been enshrined in our law since 1791.
- The founding fathers of the United States crafted 10 Amendments to our constitution —often called the “Bill of Rights”— in order to prevent abuse of power by the government.
- And for centuries, we have seen how free speech and the free press have held our government accountable.
- Martin Luther King’s years of eloquent and powerful public calls for justice and fairness – best remembered in his “I have a Dream” speech -- pushed the government to bring racial equality to America.
- Bob Woodward’s investigative reporting on Watergate revealed the illegal actions of government officials – and changed the course of my country’s history.
- The push for change and the voice of truth can come through simple spoken word or with the stroke of a pen.
- At last year’s commemoration of World Press Freedom Day, President Obama reiterated that journalists and the media “help to defend our freedoms and help our democracy to flourish.”
- Around the world, promoting press freedom is important to the United States.
- Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has delivered three speeches on internet freedom in the past year.
- Along with eight founding governments from across the globe, the United States launched the Open Government Partnership in September of 2011.

- In the past eight months, 43 additional countries have joined the Partnership, thereby committing to uphold the principles of transparent, effective and accountable governance.
- The Open Government Partnership is available to all governments that meet minimum criteria for openness and transparency. Members must:
 - o Ensure fiscal transparency
 - o Allow public access to information
 - o Disclose income and assets of Elected Officials and
 - o Encourage citizen participation in policy-making and governance.
- The United States remains a willing and committed partner in helping countries around the world to achieve these tenets of open government.
- We also understand how important it is—both for producers and consumers of media—for journalists to be well trained.
- That’s why we held a weeklong workshop for Parliamentary reporters in March. We invited an independent reporter from Washington to share his experiences covering the U.S. Congress.
- We will continue to foster these media and civil society linkages between the United States and Botswana.
- We realize that it is only through informed and regular citizen participation that we can ensure a strong and vibrant democracy.
- To be a credible reporter, to earn the trust of the public, and to facilitate the work of a democracy, journalists must uphold high standards.
- Credible reporting from government or private media must maintain objectivity, incorporate a diversity of views, and be ethically unimpeachable.
- Objectivity does not mean always having all the answers.
- Objectivity is about setting aside our prejudices and engaging in healthy skepticism in pursuit of the truth.
- If it’s not an editorial, then don’t editorialize. Let the facts speak for themselves.
- There is a real and important difference between what someone asserts to be true and what can be proven to be true.
- And it is a journalist’s job to check the facts and help the reader or listener know what can be proven and what can’t.
- Seeking a diversity of views challenges each of us to reach beyond what we think we know.

- Listen to the soft-spoken and unpopular views. Include sources with whom you don't agree. Give your audience as complete a picture as you can.
- Finally, demanding the highest ethical standards of yourself and of your colleagues is pretty simple – it means that you won't let any inducement sway you from your professional duties.
- Botswana's media fraternity boasts some very strong minds and performers.
- True as that is, none of you should cease from the pursuit of constant improvement.
- You do your job well – you could do it even better.
- As reporters, editors, and media executives, you are charged with informing the public and holding the government accountable.
- This is a huge responsibility, all the more so because you are also accountable to the very high ethical standard that the journalism profession sets for itself.
- When you are trying to meet a deadline, or deciding whether to confirm a story with a call to one more contact, or staying late into the night to make sure the story is as factual as possible—remember that through accuracy and objectivity, you are the lifeblood of democracy in this country.
- Produce work that you take pride in. On this day, we recall that around the world, your colleagues sometimes have to risk everything to deliver facts to readers and listeners.
- Honor their sacrifices and seriousness by doing your very best work. And honor the people of this great country by ensuring that you do check facts, insist on accuracy, and ask the tough questions.
- If you don't value your profession and take it seriously, no one else will.
- This is your life's work. This is your contribution. Make it count!
- So today I want to say thank you, and to celebrate with you the tremendously important work that you do.
- Thank you.