



Press, Power & Politics

**AFRICA
MEDIA FORUM**

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Map:

Grant Jerding

The Freedom Forum World Center

1101 Wilson Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22209
USA
Tel: 703/528-0800
Fax: 703/284-3529
E-mail: news@freedomforum.org
Internet: www.freedomforum.org

African Center

7th Floor, JHI House
11 Cradock Ave.
Rosebank 2196 Johannesburg
South Africa
Tel: 27-11-327-0269
Fax: 27-11-327-0242

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Forum in Accra, Ghana, examines coverage of political campaigns across Africa

The Freedom Forum continued its year-long series of international media forums on



Chris Wells, senior vice president/ international of The Freedom Forum

"Press, Power & Politics" Sept. 27-28 in Accra, Ghana.

An unprecedented joint appearance by six of the seven candidates in Ghana's Dec. 7 presidential election was clearly the highlight. It attracted an overflow crowd of 1,400 people as well as a vast television and radio audience tuned in across the West African nation.

Journalists dominated the other panel discussions, which examined how the print media, broadcasters and journalistic organizations are responding to the challenge of covering not only the multiparty presidential-election campaign but also races for the Ghanaian Parliament. The adoption of a

democratic constitution in 1992 set the stage for the blossoming of independent news organizations to compete against the state-owned media, which remain strong.

Related training sessions for Ghanaian journalists looked at how the Internet and editorial cartooning can be used in political coverage.

Although the primary focus was on the host country, the Africa Media Forum also delved into election reporting by news media in three other West African nations – Nigeria, Ivory Coast and Senegal – as well as Zimbabwe.

And, one day after the forum ended in Ghana, a Freedom Forum delegation went to another West African nation, Mali, to open a journalism library in its capital city of Bamako. The library is The Freedom Forum's second in Africa and the 15th in its network on four continents.

Previous 2000 forums on "Press, Power & Politics" were held in Lima, Peru, in March and in London in June. The series will conclude in Hong Kong in November.

Ghanaian media face test in covering election

Ghana, a West African country of ancient kingdoms and the first independent



Jerelyn Eddings, director of The Freedom Forum African Center

African republic in modern history, has vibrant news media that are actively covering a landmark political event in the nation's history – a multiparty presidential-election campaign for an open seat.

Across the country, radio stations are broadcasting political information, panel discussions, talk shows and phone-in programs about the Dec. 7 election. Newspapers, too, are dominated by political news, with headlines provoking frequent discussion about the



Joan Mower, director/African and Latin American programs of The Freedom Forum

successor to President Jerry John Rawlings, a former air force flight lieutenant who has led Ghana for the past 19 years.

British colonialists, missionaries and corporations owned the first newspapers in the former colony known as the Gold Coast. When Ghana gained independence in 1957, Kwame Nkrumah, the nation's first president, embarked on a program of "Africanization." Nkrumah's one-party socialist government established the Ghana News Agency and started the Ghana Institute of Journalism to train Africans to tell their own stories and promote the concept of African liberation. But virtually all news outlets were state-owned and state-controlled. Independent journalism, and with it, freedom of expression, ceased to exist during the Nkrumah dictatorship, which was toppled by the military in 1966.

For more than two decades, tensions flared between the media and the military rulers who controlled the country for all but two years, 1979-81. Rawlings first took

power in a coup d'etat in June 1979. He turned the country over to civilian rule three months later but returned to power in another coup in December 1981.

In 1992 a new constitution was adopted. Under it Rawlings was twice elected president but is barred from seeking a third four-year term. The constitution also guaranteed freedom of expression and established a National Media Commission with members from different segments of society to "insulate the state-owned media" from government interference.

What followed was a blossoming of private newspapers and radio in a country where news had been dominated by the state-owned media – *Daily Graphic*, *The Ghanaian Times* and the Ghana Broadcasting Corp.

Today, Ghana boasts 32 newspapers circulating in the capital city of Accra alone and several more in other major cities such as Kumasi, center of the ancient Ashanti kingdom. There are also 27 FM stations that broadcast in the country, where 35% of the 19 million people cannot read. But the government-

owned media still have the widest reach.

International observers say Ghana has a mixed record on press freedom. "Although the 1992 constitution guarantees media freedom, the government legally circumvents it," according to Freedom House, a New York-based foundation that monitors press freedom.

The Media Foundation of West Africa,

"There was a time when we couldn't write anything critical of the government. ... There is much more freedom now."

—Bob Bentil, editor, *The Ghanaian Times*

an Accra-based group, said that between August 1995 and December 1997, 62 libel cases were filed against newspapers in Accra. Politicians and political parties filed 70% of the cases.

Despite difficulties, the media climate has improved greatly, some journalists say. "There was a time when we couldn't write anything critical of the government," said Bob Bentil, editor of the government-owned *Ghanaian Times*. "Now we can. There is much more freedom now."

Ghana: media overview

- News media in Ghana include both independently owned newspapers and broadcast stations, and state-owned media.
- Despite what appears to be an open climate for the media, vigilance is a watchword for free-press advocates. Freedom House's 1999 survey on press freedom rated Ghana's press as "not free." In 1999 the Committee to Protect Journalists said Ghana has a "repressive legal climate."
- Only two of the three dozen or so regularly published newspapers are dailies, and both are state-owned: the *Daily Graphic* and *The Ghanaian Times*.
- Radio is the dominant source of information

for Ghanaians, more than a third of whom are illiterate.

- Ghana's official language is English. Local African languages are also used.
- The government-owned Ghana Broadcasting Corp. was the sole radio and television broadcaster until 1994. Today scores of privately owned radio stations fill the airwaves, but the GBC remains dominant. GBC Television, known as GTV, is also dominant, though it faces increasing competition from private channels.

Sources: The Times of London, April 18, 2000; "Press, Power and Politics: Ghana," report prepared for The Freedom Forum, September 2000; The World Factbook page on Ghana, U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, September 2000.

Government minister cautions press against 'reckless sensationalism'

Ghanaian journalists cannot afford to copy some of the "reckless sensationalism" that characterizes the media in developed countries such as the United States, John Mahama, Ghana's minister of communications, said in a keynote address for the Africa Media Forum on "Press, Power & Politics."

"The social cost would be too great," he said.

Mahama said Ghana's news media are free and independent, and wield power that can be used to promote national unity and stability and to educate the public about social and economic issues. Journalists, he said, have the capacity to present information that allows the public to make reasoned choices.

An illiteracy rate estimated at 35% puts some Ghanaians at risk of being misled or misinformed by the news media, Mahama said. "The power to manipulate the minds of the public must be exercised with the utmost sense of responsibility," he said. "It is easy to whip up antagonistic sentiments. It is much harder to cultivate critical but level-headed analysis, yet this is the task" for responsible media.

In developed countries, safe water, reliable energy, employment, education and health care are taken for granted, he said.

Those countries can tolerate some news outlets that thrive on sensationalism and scandal. "But we cannot afford this here," Mahama said.

Ghana, a young democracy, is still learning the ways of a government by the people, he said. But for centuries, a spirit of consensus in the decision-making process has existed in the Ghanaian way of life, he added.

"How do we define freedom for our people in the face of adverse world economic conditions we face?" he asked the more than 250 journalists, educators, students and government officials attending the forum. "How do we define freedom and democracy in conditions of poverty when a country cannot earn enough to provide all the safe water, schools, hospitals and roads that our people still need?"

He said accepted democratic norms "can and must accommodate our social and historic realities so that our democracy is not a mere superficial carbon copy of the outward forms of Westminster or Washington, but a deep-rooted and lasting instrument for freedom from poverty, ignorance and marginalization."

Mahama said the freedom and independence of the press were guaranteed by



Minister of Communications John Mahama says the line between information and opinion is not always clear.

Ghana's 1992 constitution. Sometimes, he said, the line between information and opinion is not clear, "whether deliberately or because of poor journalistic standards."

The government owns the country's only two daily newspapers. It also owns Ghana Broadcasting Corp., which operates the only radio and television stations to reach all parts of the country. He characterized the government's role in these properties as "little more than the shareholder of commercially run and independently managed media companies."

Mahama said the lack of coverage of opposition candidates in the run-up to the Dec. 7 presidential election sometimes can be blamed on a lack of resources — such as camera equipment and vehicles — rather than political reasons.

Former U.S. senator urges unifying Ghanaian press

Former U.S. Sen. Paul Simon urged self-restraint within the Ghanaian news media

"Be critical, but bring the country together," he said.

A former chairman of the Africa subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Simon said the press could play a key role in the current presidential and parliamentary election campaigns and in the overall future of Ghana. He said his experiences had let him to conclude that in any country two key roles are critical for the press and the government. One is keeping corruption to a minimum; the other is maintaining the stability that comes with freedom.

The Illinois Democrat and one-time newspaper publisher called on Ghanaian journalists to support news organizations threatened with losing their freedom even if they disagree with what those



Paul Simon says news media should be constructively critical.

media outlets are reporting.

Simon, a Freedom Forum trustee, said he wished he and other members of The Freedom Forum delegation could speak Twi or Ga, two widely used local languages, but he said he spoke the language of friendship and freedom, which he called more important. "This has to be the key to the future of your country, which has contributed so much," he said. He noted that Ghana led the way to independence for African nations, becoming in 1957 the first to break away from colonial rule.

Citing the prominence of Ghanaian Kofi A. Annan, secretary-general of the United Nations, and poet Maya Angelou, who once taught at the University of Ghana, Simon said Ghana is in position to lead West Africa and all of Africa. "It's a great opportunity and a great responsibility," he said.



Ready for the "great historic debate": (from left) Charles Wereko-Brobby, John Agyekum Kufuor, Augustus "Goosie" Tanoh, George P. Hagan, Dan Lartey, Edward Nasigrie Mahama.

Candidates field questions from press, public

The first-ever forum for Ghanaian presidential candidates attracted a raucous, overflow crowd of 1,400 — and six of the seven candidates — to the Accra International Conference Center auditorium.

Co-sponsored by The Freedom Forum, the Ghana Journalists Association and the Ghana Broadcasting Corp., the 90-minute discussion was carried live on television and radio by the state-owned GBC.

"This is what we've been waiting for," Godwin Avenorgbo, director of radio for the GBC, said in welcoming the chanting, cheering, banner-waving crowd. In the days leading up to the event, it was promoted on the front pages of Ghanaian newspapers, both independent and state-owned, in two-inch-high headlines as the "Great Historic Debate."

Gifty Affenyi-Dadzie, president of the Ghana Journalists Association, characterized the discussion as a milestone for Ghana. Said Charles L. Overby, chairman and chief executive officer of The Freedom Forum, "We believe every nation should have the right ... to provide its people with the opportunity to express their views and the opportunity to hear the diverse voices of others."

Conspicuous by his absence at the forum was John Evans Atta Mills, the current vice president and one-time college professor.

Moderator Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Johannesburg bureau chief of CNN, said Mills was unable to participate because of a scheduling conflict, a remark that was greeted by boos and jeers from many in the audience. Earlier in the week, Ghana's minister of communications, John Mahama, had been quot-

Democratic Congress, whose ticket in 1992 and 1996 was led by President Jerry John Rawlings.

The debate format was designed to give each candidate time to be heard and to answer questions. The candidates were allotted two minutes each for opening statements and for summations. In between, two Ghanaian journalists — newspaper columnist Audrey Gadzekpo and radio talk-show host Kwaku Sakyi-Addo — questioned the candidates in rotating fashion. Then a dozen citizens, pre-selected to represent a cross-section of the voters, posed questions.

Dominating the discussion were economic issues such as the escalating price and decreasing supply of fuel, Ghana's \$500 million budget deficit, the declining value of the Ghanaian monetary unit (the cedi), and problems faced by farmers, fishermen and would-be entrepreneurs. Among other matters discussed were the "cash and carry" system of health care that replaced a highly subsidized program, education's one-third share of the national budget, the privatization of state-owned enterprises and Ghana's criminal-libel laws.

John Agyekum Kufuor, a former member of Parliament running again as presidential candidate of the New Patriotic Party — he



ed in the government-owned *Daily Graphic* as saying Mills' unwillingness to appear stemmed partly from the government's objection to "the unnecessary involvement and interference of foreign individuals and organisations in the nation's electioneering process."

Mills is the candidate of the National

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was runner-up to Rawlings in 1996 with about 40% of the vote — said in response to a question that the libel laws are “a relic of (British) colonialism.” Calling the free flow of information “critical,” he said it is “too much to allow the government to use the criminal libel (laws) to gut the press.” At the same time, Kufuor said it was imperative that the news media be “responsible.”

Anthropology professor George P. Hagan said in an opening statement that his Convention People's Party “recognizes the mass media as a partner for growth and commits itself to the development of a free, vigorous and informed media.” Asked later whether Ghana is now a stable democracy, with no threat of a resumption of military coups, he replied, “I do believe that Ghana has matured as a nation. I do believe that in the current circumstances the military have a role, which has been defined by the constitution. And if we provided the military with what they needed, and if we — the civilians in government — behaved in a way that would not provide them a reason to come out and overthrow us, then I do believe that the military can be made to stay in the barracks.”

Other candidates at the forum were:

- Scientist and media entrepreneur Charles Wereko-Brobby of the United Ghana Movement, who said failed policies had “all but rendered ... meaningless” the “independence from which we derive our sovereignty and powers of government.”
- Former government official Augustus “Goosie” Tanoh of the National Reform Party, who said the government must “put the support systems in place that allow our people to be productive — to be competitive on the international stage and in the domestic market.”
- Businessman and one-time newspaper publisher Dan Lartey of the Great Consolidated Popular Party, who called for “a new economic order” in which Ghanaians would “produce our own goods, produce our own food, produce exports and produce our stockpiles.”
- Physician Edward Nasigrie Mahama of the People's National Convention, who pledged “honest, dedicated, dynamic and visionary leadership.”

If no candidate achieves a majority of the vote Dec. 7, the top two finishers will square off in a runoff election several weeks later.



Elvis Aryeh says journalists working in the newsroom of the state-owned *Daily Graphic* have no special access to information or candidates.

Media scramble to cover crucial Ghanaian elections

Ghanaian news organizations — those that are independently operated as well as the state-owned media — are scrambling to cover presidential and parliamentary candidates in the country's landmark elections on Dec. 7.

The challenges are enormous for broadcasters and newspapers alike, unaccustomed as they are to the phenomenon of multiparty elections and burdened by inadequate resources to track the candidates across the 93,000-square-mile nation.

Budget constraints mean that “it's not possible to cover every single political activity,” Komla Dumor of private radio station Joy FM said in one of three panel discussions on campaign coverage in Ghana.



Komla Dumor

Godwin Avenorgbo, director of radio. But he noted that GBC journalists, just like their counterparts in the privately owned media, are confounded by such problems as a fuel shortage that has resulted in long lines at

gasoline and diesel pumps.

Gaining access to the candidates is another challenge. “If political parties are unwilling to provide access ... then we are unable to give balanced coverage,” Dumor noted. He said five presidential candidates had gone on his morning talk show to answer questions, but two others — including Vice President John Evans Atta Mills, presidential candidate of the ruling National Democratic Congress party — had not yet accepted the invitation. That leaves Joy FM “open to accusations of being biased in favor of the opposition,” Dumor said.

Berifi Apenteng, general manager of privately owned TV3 and a former news director for the GBC, said campaign operatives do not appreciate how the broadcast media can help disseminate a candidate's views.

In the current political environment, “even those of us who are perceived to be singing the tunes” of the ruling government can be frustrated by barriers to access, Avenorgbo said. The GBC co-sponsored and broadcast the historic forum for presidential candidates; Atta Mills was the only candidate who declined to participate.

Until that forum, the GBC had been saddled by the public perception that its coverage favored the government. “We're doing a lot

to change that perception,” said Avenorgbo, who oversees eight FM and two shortwave stations. The network offered five minutes of radio and TV airtime to each presidential candidate. In addition, it allotted an hour to each political party for discussion of issues.

Elvis Aryeh, editor of the state-owned *Daily Graphic*, expressed similar sentiments. “Many people think that the state’s media ... have (special) access to information. In fact, we don’t. We go through many, many difficulties in getting the information that we print,” he said. Moreover, the *Graphic* has “opened its columns to the public — in fact, to everybody.”

However, Nana Kofi Coomson, publisher of *The Ghanaian Chronicle* and president of the Private Newspaper Publishers Association of Ghana, said the playing field is hardly level. Relief from value-added taxes would help the independent news media, Coomson said.

Ghana’s privately owned newspapers — none of which publish daily — face “serious logistical constraints” that impede comprehensive campaign coverage, said Kwaku Baako Jr., editor of *The Crusading Guide*. “Unlike the state-owned media that [have] correspondents and offices across the regions and the districts, some of us do not find ourselves in that situation,” he said.

Outside the capital of Accra, his twice-weekly newspaper makes do with three regional reporters and two stringers, Baako said.

By contrast, the Ghana News Agency has 111 reporters and 60 stringers across all of Ghana’s regions. The news agency has been government-subsidized, but it is evolving toward private enterprise, said Edward Ameyibor, the supervising chief editor. The news agency considers elections to be “harvest periods” and this year to be “a bumper

harvest,” Ameyibor said. But he complained that newspapers and broadcasters lack the capacity to carry many of the news agency’s political reports.

The privately owned news media can be further hamstrung when politicians file or threaten lawsuits charging criminal libel. Ben Ephson, editor of *The Dispatch*, an independent tri-weekly, said it is well-known that “the private press operates on a shoestring budget.”

“It’s not that we are afraid to go to court,” Ephson said, “it is just a bloody waste of our time.”

One radio station is trying to cover the campaigns entirely with volunteers using donated equipment. Radio Ada, a non-profit station that broadcasts in the Dangbe language from the rural community of Big Ada, offered six political parties 11 hours apiece. “Each party is free to decide what issues it wants to project,” said Wilna Quarmyne, deputy chief executive. “Sometimes they will be local issues, sometimes they will be national issues, but in a very real sense national issues and local issues are the same.” For example, people “hungry at the local level” blame “policies at the national level,” she said.

Through radio even illiterate people can follow the campaigns and thereby participate in the democratic process, Quarmyne noted. Ghana’s literacy rate is estimated to be about 65%, with persistent high rates of illiteracy in rural areas.

The elections also are being covered by the British Broadcasting Corp., a logical outgrowth of Ghana’s status from 1844 until 1957 as a British colony known as the Gold Coast.

Elizabeth Akua Ohene, a native of Ghana who is deputy editor of the network’s English-

language programming for Africa, said the BBC World Service has vast resources that can produce superior analytical reporting.

Before the 1999 elections in Nigeria, Ohene spent two months traveling around that country and filing stories. “It [cost] a lot

“It’s not that we are afraid to go to court, it is just a bloody waste of our time.”

—Ben Ephson, editor, *The Dispatch*

of money,” but the BBC can afford it, she said. Ohene said she “gained more insight” than Nigerian journalists who were unable to travel nationally.

Also watching developments from London is *West Africa* magazine. Until last year *West Africa* was privately owned, but when the magazine faltered economically it was acquired by the state-owned Daily Graphic publishing company, said Adama Gaye, editor and general manager.

Sounding a familiar theme, Gaye observed that no one winces when private publications go to advertisers for money, “but the very moment an African publication attempts to get money from government ... people start suspecting that it will start running (content) for the government.” That “is not the case,” he said.

Inadequate resources also have stood in the way of political polling by Ghanaian news organizations. Gifty Affenyi-Dadzie, president of the Ghana Journalists Association, said she hopes to offer seminars on how to conduct polls about candidates and issues. Tim Acquah-Hayford, chairman of the National Media Commission, a constitutionally chartered watchdog organization, said such training would be useful for future elections.

Coomson of the Private Newspaper Publishers Association said media polls can help Ghana’s politicians to develop public policy that reflects public opinion, much as happens in the United States. “This is a very important aspect of the growth of the democratic ethos” in Ghana, he said.

Looking at the situation generally, Baako said, “This is a very young and fragile democracy,” and “without a critical media culture, democracy cannot grow.”



From left: *The Ghanaian Chronicle*’s Nana Kofi Coomson, Radio Ada’s Wilna Quarmyne and the BBC’s Elizabeth Akua Ohene describe coverage challenges.

Ghanaian cartoonists lament their professional isolation and vulnerability to lawsuits

Ghanaian editorial and comic cartoonists, in what they said was an unprecedented gathering, described their professional isolation and noted their vulnerability to politically motivated libel lawsuits. They also pointed out that their training opportunities were few.

On the other hand, they noted that their skills allowed them to convey complex and important messages in a small amount of space. And their work and messages can reach semiliterate audiences that can be beyond the immediate reach of other print journalists.

Those were among the pitfalls and benefits of cartooning that were analyzed during



Robert Russell

a workshop conducted by Robert Russell, executive director of the Arlington, Va.-based Cartoonists Rights Network, and convened in conjunction with the Africa Media Forum.

More than 45 Ghanaian cartoonists, editors and illustrators attended the program, and several said they often felt excluded from debates about journalism, as well as from seminars and training sessions. No newspaper in Ghana employs a full-time cartoonist.

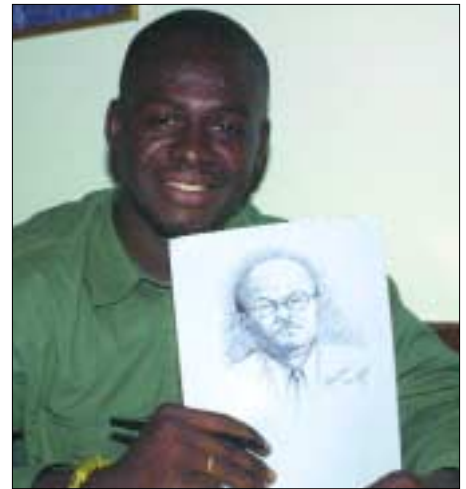
Russell said that feelings of isolation among cartoonists were not unusual. Similar comments had been made during a similar program last June in Cameroon, he said, adding that U.S. cartoonists often voice such complaints, too.

Participants in the Ghana program also said the potential impact of cartoonists' work often seems lost on editors and publishers. Cartooning in Ghana is a buyers' market: Participants described having been promised the equivalent of \$10 for a cartoon, only to end up being paid \$1.50.

Cartoons, including those lampooning political figures, also can be risky, sometimes

leading to legal troubles for artists. The workshop was told that criminal libel laws were increasingly used to punish or even prevent the publication of bold cartoons.

The participants closed the workshop by formally organizing. "I had no idea this would happen, but we made history here today," said Alhaji Ali Yemoh, chosen interim president of the yet-to-be-named organization.



Lawrence Nana Aianah Henson shows his sketch of workshop leader Robert Russell.

Net technology making inroads into Ghanaian journalism

Ghana was the first African country to establish local Internet service. That was 1994. Now the former English colony has been cited by *The Wall Street Journal* as one of the five "Silicon nations" to watch in terms of "connectivity, information security, human capital, business climate and priority given by government" to technology.

To help journalists maximize the use of that growing resource in Ghana, two technology experts from the United States conducted a three-hour training session during the Africa Media Forum.

Adam Clayton Powell III, vice president of technology and programs at The Freedom Forum, and Stephen Miller, assistant to the technology editor at *The New York Times*, led the group of 25 people through a discussion of 36 Internet sites that can help journalists do their jobs.

Miller said the Internet and off-the-shelf database and spreadsheet software were not substitutes for reporting, but were becoming essential tools to help ferret out and organize complex material.

Miller and Powell demonstrated how to use the Internet offerings, including powerful new search engines and a site that caches sometimes hard-to-access pages.

Included in the demonstration was a look at several sites with satellite photos that can be reproduced by news organiza-

tions. "If there were a major flood or earthquake somewhere in the world, you could get a satellite photo from these sites long before one of the wire services could position a photographer at the scene and begin to transmit pictures," Powell said.

In Ghana, eight technology centers have been set up to provide Internet access to remote areas. "They may have only one computer in the village," he said, "but the people are learning how to use it."

Hardware for an Internet setup is expensive in Ghana, where the minimum wage is less than 50 cents a day. If a computer is available, it isn't always used for reporting.

For instance, Alfred Ogbamey, an editor at the *Ghanaian Chronicle*, said the privately owned, thrice-weekly newspaper has only one computer and uses it mainly for e-mail — mostly from and to the United States, where an estimated 150,000 to 300,000 Ghanaians live.

By contrast, at the government-owned Ghana Broadcasting Corp., computers are used to research news stories on the Internet, according to Roberta L. Gardiner, head of television training.

The Ghanaian government also has started a program to lay fiber-optic cable. The current telephone dial-up path to the Internet is slow and often balky, especially outside Accra, the capital city.



From left: Doyinsola Abiola of Concord Group Newspapers in Nigeria, Freedom Neruda of *Notre Voie* in Ivory Coast and Mark Chavunduka of *The Standard* in Zimbabwe describe the media climate in their countries.

West African editor: Journalists must cope with ‘government arrogance’

Journalists from several African nations see uncertain times ahead for the press as government policies toward the media remain unpredictable.

Kabral Blay-Amihere, president of the 16-nation West African Journalists Association, said the main challenge facing journalists is “government arrogance.”

“They pay lip service to press freedom,” he said.

Blay-Amihere, who is editor of the twice-weekly *Independent* in Ghana, praised the Internet, saying it enables the journalists’ association to monitor press freedom across West Africa. He said he also uses the Internet to mobilize international opinion whenever freedom of the press is threatened, putting the government in question in the world spotlight.

Doyinsola Abiola, editor in chief of Concord Group Newspapers in Nigeria, called for continued cooperation and consultation among editors of West Africa.

Nigeria

Abiola described the media climate in Nigeria as “interesting but dangerous.” She said journalists are becoming part of the story rather than objective onlookers. “This

is not as it should be,” she said.

Newspapers are so transparent in their biases that “you can almost predict what a newspaper will say about a national issue,”

“We have an elected government, but we should keep on our toes.”

—Doyinsola Abiola, editor in chief, Concord Group Newspapers

she said. Ethnicity is “very pronounced,” adding to the tense times.

The trend began when dictator Sani Abacha died unexpectedly two years ago. At the time of his rule, a courageous press fought his policies. “When you have a common enemy, you all gang up,” Abiola said. She called the shift in the media climate a “dangerous trend.”

Now, an elected government wants to register journalists, Abiola said. Journalists have taken their objection to the proposed policy to court.

“We are more vigilant now than ever,” she said. “We have an elected government, but we should keep on our toes.”

Ivory Coast

Freedom Neruda, editor of *Notre Voie*,

an independent daily in Abidjan and a leading opposition newspaper, said he fears the Ivory Coast is headed toward a resumption of military dictatorship. Gen. Robert Guei seized power in a coup last December, overthrowing another authoritarian ruler, Henri Konan Bédié, and set elections for Oct. 22.

Problems for the press, though, began long before Guei. Since 1990, for instance, more than 20 journalists have been jailed and more than 100 have been sued, Neruda said. He was one of three journalists jailed in 1996 for a year on a charge of insulting the president.

Neruda praised the candidates’ forum that attracted six of the seven men vying to be the next president of Ghana. “We don’t have this in my country,” he said. In Ivory Coast, 19 candidates initially ran for president, but they would never appear on the same forum, he said. (On Oct. 6, the country’s Supreme Court — headed by a Guei loyalist — disqualified 14 of 18 opposition candidates from running against Guei on Oct. 22. Two days after the election in which he appeared to trail opposition leader Laurent Gbagbo, Guei proclaimed

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himself the winner. This triggered a revolt that drove Guei from power and elevated Gbagbo to the presidency.)

Senegal

Latif Coulibaly, director of the Superior Institute for Information Sciences and Communications in Dakar, was nonplussed by a suggestion that the Senegalese news media performed admirably during peaceful presidential elections last March.

"The press did its job" by providing coverage and commentary, said Coulibaly, former chief editor for the *Sud* daily newspaper in Dakar. "When the press does its job in Africa, people ask what happened." In the United States, he noted, the press isn't questioned when things go right.

Zimbabwe

Mark Chavunduka, editor of *The Standard*, a privately owned Sunday newspaper published in Harare, said it is easy in Zimbabwe to distinguish between independent newspapers and the government press. The state-owned newspapers are carefully scripted, he said, with no attempt to balance news reports.

The Standard, he said, covers all sides of political issues, including the government's position. "We try to be fair."

Chavunduka said television and radio are controlled by the government. But he noted that on Sept. 22 the country's Supreme Court ruled that the state's monopoly on broadcast services violated the constitution. "While I welcome this development, I'm not so sure the government will easily give in," he said.

Over the years, opposition candidates have been allocated only a fraction of the air time given to candidates associated with President Robert Mugabe's political party, ZANUPF.

Chavunduka and a colleague were arrested and jailed last year for reporting about a coup attempt against Mugabe. The two were tortured in an effort to force them to reveal their sources about the plot. They were released after several days.

Mugabe's government suffered a defeat in parliamentary elections in June. But Chavunduka said there's no guarantee that a new government would respect press freedom.

Freedom Forum opens library for journalists in Mali



Guests arrive at the Maison de la Presse complex in downtown Bamako for the dedication of the journalism library.

BAMAKO, Mali — The Freedom Forum opened a library for journalists at the Maison de la Presse (Press House) in Bamako. One of 15 Freedom Forum journalism libraries around the world, the library is the first of its kind in Mali and the second library sponsored by The Freedom Forum in Africa.

The library has "truly magnified the role of the press in Mali" and "is a symbol of the democratization of the nation," said Sadou Yattara, chairman of Maison de la Presse.

Ousmane Sy, Mali's minister of territorial administration and local communities, said the library's Internet capability will enable the Malian press "to be connected to the rest of the world."

The U.S. ambassador to Mali, Michael Ranneberger, said a free press "will help resolve the problems" in the West African nation, which is one of the world's most impoverished countries.

"It says something about the importance of Mali — and the freedom that you have here — that of the 200 nations of the world, yours is one of the 15 that have been selected" by The Freedom Forum for a library, said former U.S. Sen. Paul Simon, a Freedom Forum trustee.

The opening ceremony was held the day after The Freedom Forum concluded its Africa Media Forum in Accra, Ghana.

Tailored for French-speaking journalists and journalism students, the library offers books and other publications as well as computer and Internet access.



At the ribbon-cutting are (from left) Freedom Forum trustee Paul Simon, Maison de la Presse chairman Sadou Yattara (partially obscured), Malian minister Ousmane Sy, and The Freedom Forum's Chris Wells and Jerelyn Eddings.

Ghana says *Akwaaba* (welcome) to the Africa Media Forum



Thirty-two newspapers are available in Ghana's capital city, Accra.

From top: Presidential hopeful John Agyekum Kufuor (seated) is greeted by questioner Kwaku Sakyi-Addo of Joy FM radio as row upon row of Ghanaians await the start of the candidates' forum, which was moderated by Charlayne Hunter-Gault of CNN.

The Freedom Forum, based in Arlington, Va., is a nonpartisan, international foundation dedicated to free press, free speech and free spirit for all people. The foundation focuses on four main priorities: the Newseum, First Amendment issues, newsroom diversity and world press freedom.

The Freedom Forum funds two independent affiliates — the Newseum, the interactive museum of news in Arlington; and the First Amendment Center, with offices at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., and in New York City and Arlington. Other operating offices are in San Francisco, Cocoa Beach, Fla., Buenos Aires, Hong Kong, Johannesburg and London.

The Freedom Forum was established in 1991 under the direction of Founder Allen H. Neuharth as successor to a foundation started in 1935 by newspaper publisher Frank E. Gannett. The Freedom Forum is not affiliated with Gannett Co., does not solicit or accept financial contributions, and does not accept unsolicited funding requests. Its work is supported by income from an endowment now worth more than \$1 billion in diversified assets.



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