

Remarks By President of SLAJ, Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, at the 9th IMC Media Awards 2021 at Radisson Blu Hotel, Aberdeen, Lumley, Freetown, on 23rd April, 2021 at 6pm



SLAJ President, Ahmed Sahid Nasralla

Opening courtesies...

Let me start by expressing my appreciation to the Independent Media Commission (IMC) for joining SLAJ in the business of supporting excellence in journalism through the recognition and award for professional work.

Tonight, I stand here with mixed feelings. I see the expectant faces of colleagues in the audience and I miss that feeling of anxiety. Before this 9th awards ceremony, my place was in that audience... And Alhaji Hon I.B Kargbo was here in my place... and then it was Umaru Fofana... and Kelvin Lewis. Tonight, I am in their place...Addressing you all... And expecting no award.

So we welcome the IMC back to the fold in the business of giving out media awards, since they have been missing in action for several years now. I must admit though that it is through no fault of this present administration. But in all honesty, we believe that many hands make light work, and any attempt to promote the drive for excellence in our profession will undoubtedly receive the full support of SLAJ.

Although we have appealed to the Commission to drop their awards scheme and support SLAJ to do a much bigger and well-organised annual media awards.

Mr. Chairman, the Bible says in Luke12:48 “... ***For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.***”

In my view, when we look at these scriptures in the context of the repeal of the criminal libel law, it means that society has given us what we asked for. Now it is time for us as journalists to give back to society.

Our country today is at crossroads. If it is not police killing unarmed civilians, it is parliamentarians fighting in Parliament. If it is not civilians burning down houses in revenge, it is Okada Riders in street fights with the police. All of these are serious challenges facing our country today. It's like our country is on the edge again.

As journalists we must be concerned and we have a role to play in all of this. But we can only play this role if we practice professionally. We cannot be partisan in reporting the fighting in Parliament. If we do, we will only be pouring petrol in the fire. And this is the same for all the conflicts raging presently. We must be very careful in the way we report, so that we do not by our reports inflame passions and drag this country into conflict again. Sierra Leone is the only country we have and it is our sacred duty to protect it.

This is why it is important for us to have an event like today's, because when we award journalists for their work, it is our hope that it will act as motivation for them to practice professionally. It is also our hope that those who will not win today will be further motivated to do better next time. At the end, awarding journalists for their work is not only recognising their competence to deliver good stories but it is also promoting excellence in our profession.

Nevertheless, may I hasten to caution that winning awards should not be your over riding ambition as Journalists. When you sit down to write a news story or a feature article, your focus should not be on getting an award for it. If the award comes fine, but your focus is to perform a national duty diligently; your focus is to play your part in holding this nation together through ethical and professional practice.

Let me end by congratulating in advance those who will be winners today, and to encourage those who submitted reports but are not fortunate to have won, to continue working hard. There is always a next time. If you do not win now, remember the SLAJ Awards is round the corner as well. If you step up your game, it is another opportunity for you to be celebrated.

As I close let me thank the Chairman, Commissioners and Staff of IMC for helping to promote excellence in journalism.

Thank you for listening to me.

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