

6th Annual Journalism Excellence Awards

Held at Hotel Intercontinental, Nairobi.

Speech by Dr. Nancy Booker: Assistant Professor of Multimedia Journalism, Graduate School of Media and Communications (AKU) and Chief Judge AJEA 2017

The Chief Justice and the President of the Supreme Court of Kenya,

Media Council of Kenya Board,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good evening.

It is another year when we come together to celebrate this noble profession. I am delighted to share this great evening with the industry's best and to have served as the Chair of the AJEA panel of Judges for the second year running. Like any good politician, I have served my two terms as Chair and I am honored that the panel of judges saw it fit to award me a second term, which doesn't come easy these days. !

AJEA as is popularly known remains one of most respected and prestigious journalism awards here in Kenya and as has been evidenced over the years, only the best among the best are feted. And so tonight we gather for the 6th time, to celebrate and to honor;

- Journalists whose work has had impact
- Journalists who have lived to the ethical principles guiding our profession,
- Journalists, who in the advent of alternative facts and fake news, have remained steadfast in ensuring that their stories are fact-based and
- Journalists whose push to tell a good story keeps them awake at night and whose commitment to the public that they serve, remains unmatched.

This year, we received over 700 hundred entries, a drop from the 900 that were received last year. This is as a result of some of the categories being merged to ensure that entries were made to the right categories. But even with the drop in the number of entries, the nomination panel and the panel of judges did not have an easy time.

We spent an average of 16 working hours on any given day, to ensure that we arrived at those who will be honored this evening. These hours were spent sifting through hours of stories, that at some point this became the norm. I remember returning to work and reading the newspaper and assessing stories based on their relevance, adherence to ethical principles, sourcing and impact, just to name but some of the criteria that we used to determine the winning entries. I am sure the same can be said of my colleagues.

We were indeed a great team, and ladies and gentlemen, these team remained very professional and committed to the end because having been there, done that, they understand the importance of good journalism for a country such as ours. The panel of judges constituted; Mr. John Gachie, Dr. George Nyabuga (The Vice Chair) Madam Dorothy Kweyu, Dr. Joseph Nyanoti, Ms. Christine Nguku and last but most certainly the wisest of us all, Mzee Joe Kadhi or as we fondly refer to him Mwalimu. May I ask them to stand wherever they are so that we can acknowledge them ... Thank you!

Ladies and Gentlemen, there is also a very special team who sift through even longer hours of content, longer hours of radio stories and much more word count to ensure that they nominate the best that can stand the test by the panel of judges. This ladies and gentlemen, is the nominating panel of judges, this year, chaired by Dr. James Oranga, Rose-Lukalo Owino, Roseline Nzioka, Eric Shimoli, Isaiah Cherotich, Caleb Atemi and Dr Joy Mueni. Again, I ask that the judges in the nominating committee please rise so that we can acknowledge them with an even greater acknowledgement. ... Thank you!

Ladies and gentlemen. The journalism profession has over the last year, faced several challenges from various quarters. With digitization and the changes that continue to shape how news is sourced, packaged and delivered, media houses have struggled to remain afloat and as result, cut down on their staff numbers. These actions have robbed newsrooms of some of the celebrated names and the experienced journalists at a time when the harvest is plentiful and the labourers are few, as the good book says, and more so as we get into the election mode where good journalism becomes a basic need for the citizenry.

The other greatest challenge has been that audiences can now receive stories as they happen and, on their smart phones. The phrase in most newsrooms today is digital first. But while this is applauded and is praiseworthy, it must not be lost to us that today untruths appear alongside truths and that our profession is facing an existential crisis – a threat to the very relevance and

usefulness of our profession where there are as many news sources as those who can access the digital space. This has given rise to fake news and what we have come to refer to as alternative fact. What then does this portend for us?

One, that sourcing is increasingly becoming a key component of story telling. Just who are our sources? How diverse are they? How credible are they? And can we still afford to double source and triple source as we strive to be the first to tell the story? Many of us struggle with publishing first, and verifying sources and information received before running with it and having to eat humble pie and apologize later. You are all familiar with how these has affected our day-to-day work, particularly in the election period. During our six-day assignment we came across some great stories but that were very poorly sourced, single sourced or lacked attribution. Then again there were stories that were brilliantly told, well sourced and were properly attributed and followed up in what we have now come to refer to as Day two journalism.

Two, depth has become the selling point for most of our stories. For audiences to pay attention to our stories, we must promise more than what they can get on social media. In-depth reporting calls for exploring stories much more deeply with passion, patience, persistence and perfection. The truth is that the stakes are much higher today and while some of the stories that we judged had very good depth, there were some potentially good stories that fell short in depth, and particularly in the Business and ICT categories. In talking about ICT, there are several young people coming with innovative ideas that require coverage and interrogation but the media is not doing justice to these young people. Their stories have news value, they are novel and would make for good features but they are not told or when told, not told properly. We also do not appear to be investing in the ICT desks. Many of these desks are manned by young entrants in the newsrooms as the seasoned journalists pursue the political beats, yet this is the next big frontier. Depth also means allocating resources for journalists to tell a good story. Sadly not much of this is being done and many are opting to go it alone as independent news providers, where they do good stories that stations do not think twice about airing.

Ladies and gentlemen, journalism ethics has to be at the core of what we do. Many of you know that this is one of Mzee Joe's mantra- always asking what ethical principles did the journalist take into account. It is sad to note that while the profession and the respective media houses have journalism ethical principles that should guide our work, there were several journalists whose pieces went against ethical principles by exposing victims of sexual violence, naming and identifying children, intruding into grief and shock, unnamed

sources, bad taste and tone in reporting and the exposure of innocent relatives and friends. Sadly, some of these were disqualified.

But there were some exiting times during the six days, when we encountered great stories, well told. I must acknowledge that in some instances, arriving at the ultimate winner was not an easy task. On several occasions, it took long hours of debate, rereads, re-listenings and re-views to determine who the winners would be. Categories, such as Development, Gender reporting and Good Governance presented us with a huge challenge but a winner had to be determined. And so to those who will be feted in those categories tonight, remember you are first among equals and that you are just as good as your last story. Winning is one thing, retaining that position is another, as there are very many good storytellers out here. In talking about categories, I urge the Media Council of Kenya to not only open the awards to include entries in vernacular languages but to also consider awarding journalists or media houses who use online technology to produce quality journalism and to tell compelling stories.

In conclusion ladies and gentlemen, I now wish to address the winners of these years awards. Tonight, you join roll of AJEA winners who through their work have made a difference in peoples lives, because that's what good journalism is all about. Congratulations! Indeed this is no mean achievement and like any good thing, we have higher and greater expectations of you going forward!

To the rest of us in this room who continue to support good journalism in various ways, thank you in a big way and please continue to do so because as the great historian Simon Schama says ***“if ever there’s a time to celebrate, honor, protect and mobilise for press freedom and basic good journalism, its now.”***

Congratulations once more to the AJEA 2017 winners.

Thank you all and God bless you.