MESSAGE ON PRESS FREEDOM DAY, 3 MAY 2020

By Ms. Rosa Malango, UN Resident Coordinator & Designated Official for Security

On the occasion of World Press Freedom Day 2020, on behalf of the United Nations in Uganda I would like to recognize all journalists in Uganda for the commendable work you are doing in sensitizing the public and preventing the spread of COVID-19. I would also like to thank the Government of Uganda for recognizing journalists as essential workers during this challenging period. Early actions by the Government supported by journalists have contributed to preventing the spread of COVID-19 in Uganda.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the media in Uganda has provided information on the disease, on prevention measures and the government response. We have also learned about the plight of people across the country who have lost incomes and livelihoods, informing our call for a robust effort to address the socio-economic impact of COVID-19. The media highlighted the increase in domestic and gender-based violence, on women unable to reach health centers to deliver their babies due to movement restrictions as well as cases of stigma and discrimination by community members against persons suspected of having contracted or who have recovered from COVID-19.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres notes that, “as the pandemic spreads, it has also given rise to a second pandemic of misinformation, from harmful health advice to wild conspiracy theories. The press provides the antidote: verified,
scientific, fact-based news and analysis." As we commemorate this year’s World Press Freedom Day, let us use this as an opportunity to recommit ourselves to protecting the rights and freedoms of journalists and media personnel in Uganda and around the world. In the Ugandan context, this is guaranteed by Article 29 (1) (a) of the Constitution on the right to freedom of speech and expression, including that of the press and other media. The independence of the media and the enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression are essential components in democratic societies, including in our efforts to prevent, respond to and recover from the current COVID-19 pandemic.

The theme for World Press Freedom Day 2020 is “Journalism without Fear or Favour.” In line with this theme and the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic, there has never been a better opportunity to show support for the importance of free and independent media that provides accurate information, facilitates public debate and holds government and other relevant institutions to account. Freedom of the media and freedom of expression are both fundamental human rights and also critical enablers for sustainable inclusive development.

I conclude by re-echoing the UN Secretary-General’s message, ‘today, we thank the media for providing facts and analysis; for holding leaders – in every sector – accountable; and for speaking truth to power. We particularly recognize those who are playing a life-saving role reporting on public health.’ We call on the Government to ensure the protection of media workers, particularly during this time of COVID-19. We invite partners to help secure Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for frontline workers including journalists.

On behalf of the UN in Uganda I reiterate our commitment to support media workers in Uganda to promote universal values and overcome challenges together.

ENDS.