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PINA Condemns attack on newspaper publisher in Vanuatu

The Pacific Islands News Association (PINA) condemns the ridiculous attitude of a statement minister in Vanuatu, attacking the publisher of the Vanuatu Daily Post newspaper Marc Neil Jones on Friday (04 March).

"I wish to record my grave concern at the attack on the publisher of the Daily Post newspaper last weekend, and the fact that one of our state ministers was involved in an act of 'taking the law into one's hand', which no one person living in a 'democratic' society would expect to happen, let alone the involvement of a government leader", says PINA President Moses Stevens.

Stevens said this is the second time that Neil Jones has been attacked, and the latest incident brings the safety and security of media practitioners into question.

"No one is above the law, and that goes for all citizens including media practitioners and state leaders. I call on all members of the society, including national and provincial leaders, to use our laws to resolve issues and to move away from our supposedly long gone primitive ways of resorting to physical action to avenge for any wrong doing, because our civilized society is governed by laws that protect one's rights, as well as providing appropriate means and ways through and with which issues could and should be resolved.

"I am particularly concerned because of the fact that a state minister has been involved in the incident. Media in Vanuatu is under the Prime Minister, who is head of the government of the day. Such an irresponsible attitude of a member of the Prime Minister's cabinet is nothing short of a disgrace on the minister for media and the government as a whole.

"Vanuatu is a democratic country, and as such, there are appropriate mechanisms and institutions that are in place to uphold the rule of law and to protect the integrity and rights of the individual; meaning that any one feeling that his/her rights or integrity has

been damaged or infringed in any way or form by another, or the media for that matter, should take the matter up with the appropriate avenues where the strength of the laws are tested and applied accordingly so as to resolve the issues.”

The former president of Media Asosiesen blong Vanuatu (MAV) said PINA recognizes the role of MAV in the development of the media industry in Vanuatu and at the same time PINA understands MAV has a code of ethics and rules through and with which any question on media practices in Vanuatu should be dealt with.

He said it is really sad to see a state minister in a democratic government supporting or aiding people taking the laws in their own hands.

“Leaders should lead by example, but if they are supporting such criminal acts, then how can we be assured of the safety of media practitioners in Vanuatu, and the safety of society members for that matter.

“PINA calls on the minister for media in Vanuatu to address the issue at his level, and at the same PINA encourages MAV and members of the media industry in Vanuatu to operate within the journalism code of practice and always uphold the spirit of fairness in their reporting. This is to ensure that all sides of the story are covered before publication or broadcast of any news article.

“Having said the above, I also wish to express disappointment at allegations of unbalanced and unfair reporting practices in Vanuatu media. It is alleged that the attack on Neil Jones was the result of biased reporting on issues that had seemingly implicated the state minister to be on the wrong.

“Let us remind ourselves of our basic journalism rule, to always carry all sides of the story before publish/broadcast,” said Stevens.

He added that media freedom should or must NOT be used as a cover up for those who do not respect journalism as a genuine, respectable and responsible "trade" that should be used to enhance and promote a true democratic environment in the society.

Media company owners and publishers should refrain from interfering in the editorial decision and responsibility of their Editors, which often leads to publishing and broadcasting of unbalanced news items.

“At the end of the day, such a poor quality of journalism would only reflect upon the Editor and not the owners or publishers. Vanuatu has some of the region's highly qualified and experienced journalists in the media industry.

“It would be equally immoral for someone to attack a journalist, and for the media to publish a biased article that impacts negatively on an individual. No one is guilty until the court declares him/her otherwise.

“PINA encourages its members to work closely with their governments so that a better understanding could be established on the role of the media, and the governments accepting media as a significant partner and or major player in the nationhood building process of our developing island countries”, said the PINA President .

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