



Accra, February 14, 2022

### **MEDIA RELEASE**

The CSJ has been observing with concern the recent spate of arrests of journalists and activists. The high-handed nature of these arrests have only aided in raising tensions in the country and serves as bitter reminders of the not too distant past where the criminal libel law was enforced in this country.

We would like to believe that when President Akufo-Addo echoed the words of President George W. Bush and urged Ghanaians to behave like citizens and not spectators, he was being sincere. Rather than appearing to intimidate citizens with dissenting opinions, we encourage the government to listen closely to what those that put them in power are saying. Feedback from the public and from civil society, however unpalatable on issues like government's E-levy policy, is worth listening to for redress.

As we encourage opinion leaders to be circumspect in their utterances, the real issue at stake here is not about journalists or activists who have gone overboard in their criticism. A close look at all the arrests and the views expressed, leading to the arrests, reveals a common thread. Economically, these are very difficult times for ordinary Ghanaians. The cost of living is high, and many of our compatriots are barely scraping by. The frustration of the Ghanaian people, variously expressed by the men who have been arrested is that we do not see the political elite making the kinds of sacrifices they are demanding of Ghanaians.

Citizens have also noted the reluctance of the government to account for monies spent. To date the government has refused to furnish the people's representatives in parliament with information on how much it is costing the taxpayer to fund the President's trips abroad in chartered flights.

The famous Chinua Achebe quote says that the old lady is always uncomfortable at the mention of dry bones. It seems our government is extremely jittery when we remind them that the suffering masses are tired of funding their champagne lifestyles.

Instead of resorting to intimidation, it will serve government well to listen and take immediate and significant steps to reduce waste and corruption. It is only then that people would be willing to make more sacrifices.

The CSJ urges the government to cease the high-handed responses to criticism and allow for a healthy debate on national issues. Far from intimidating Ghanaians, the current posture is only making Ghanaians angrier.

As we prepare to celebrate our 65th independence anniversary as a country, the CSJ encourages all Ghanaians to be bold and defend the freedom and justice our ancestors won for us at such a high cost.

Long live Ghana

Long live our democracy

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