

BY SYLVIA KATUSHABE

KAMPALA. Media rights defenders and journalists' bodies have cautiously welcomed a pledge by newly elected Speaker of Parliament Jacob Marksons Oboth, alias Oboth-Oboth, to foster a transparent relationship with the media.

They described the remarks as a potential turning point after years of strained relations between Parliament and journalists.

In his maiden speech as Speaker of the 12th Parliament on Monday, Mr Oboth said the media should not be treated as an adversary but as a critical pillar of accountability and public access to information.

His remarks appeared to signal a departure from the restrictive posture associated with the 11th Parliament under former Speaker Anita Among, during whose tenure journalists from the Nation Media Group-Uganda (NMG-U) were blocked from accessing parliamentary proceedings under unclear circumstances.

Mr Joseph Beyanga, the secretary general of the National Association of Broadcasters, said: "What has happened over the last couple of years, and if you check the World Index on Media Freedom, Uganda has been declining year after year. And I think at the moment we have one of the worst ratings. But what he said sounds exciting, given the background of where we came from."

Media welcome Oboth's pledge on press freedom

"The test is always when it comes to the practical, when the different political interests start conflicting with the demand for accountability. That's when we see people behaving differently," he added.

Mr Beyanga said the media sector expects more than symbolic openness, calling for reforms that promote press freedom, sustainability, and improved funding for the industry.



'Media is not the enemy'

An objective and ethical media is not our enemy but the public's eyes and ears.

When we close our doors to the

media, negative perception is generated. If we are clean and doing a good job, why hide?

- Jacob Marksons Oboth, alias Oboth-Oboth, Speaker of Parliament

Veteran journalist and former Kira Municipality MP Ibrahim Ssemujju Nganda said friction between the media and political leaders is unavoidable in Uganda whenever journalists pursue accountability.

"There will always be problems

with the media, everywhere you go, if you do your job. You may not be chased from Parliament as Anita Among did, but there is bound to be a collision one way or the other," Mr Ssemujju said.

"Mr Oboth is an appointee brought by Museveni and his son. I highly doubt that he's going to create conditions that are different from conditions obtained in the country," he added.

The Secretary General of the Uganda Journalists Association, Mr Emmanuel Kirunda, said: "As the media, we are open to dialogue and collaboration because we are not enemies of the State. We are not enemies of any other organs of government, like Parliament as it had been portrayed by the previous leadership."

Meanwhile, Uganda Law Society president Isaac Ssemakadde said Parliament's commitment to transparency would ultimately be measured by whether sensitive parliamentary processes are opened to public scrutiny.

"The proof of the pudding is in the eating. Will Speaker Oboth-Oboth finally open the proceedings of the Appointments Committee to the media? Will he permit and facilitate public participation in the appointment process? That's the litmus test for open Parliament in Uganda today," Mr Ssemakadde said.