

Condemnation of the attack on Radio Ada by the National Coalition on Mining (NCOM)

As Radio Ada continues to count the cost to it from the events of Thursday January 13, 2022, the National Coalition on Mining (NCOM), would like to add its voice to those who have already expressed their shock at and condemnation of the attack carried out on the station by a gang of unidentified armed men. The brazen, broad daylight incident has left many including our members in shock as to how a community radio, which voluntarily serves the community could be attacked and vandalized.

The incident clearly represents an attack on free expression, a right guaranteed by the 1992 Constitution of Ghana and which is at the core of democracy. It also shows what civil society has been warning about, how increasingly, democratic space is shrinking with the growing number of incidents of attacks against media that aim to clamp down on voices and institutions that ask critical questions of power and facilitate citizens' expression.

Radio Ada, a community radio established in 1996, has been at the forefront of enabling public awareness and discussion of issues relevant to the Ada community all these years and enabling a healthy culture of debate within the community. Unlike a for profit commercial radio station, its work has been anchored by the sacrifices, commitments, and dedication of volunteer staff. In 25 years of its existence there has been no confrontation over or threat to its operations. Not against its infrastructure nor against its volunteer workers. It is thus not just the voice of the voiceless and marginalized but also a rendezvous point for all as it offers its premises for all kinds of communal activities.

The thugs who attacked Radio Ada stated categorically that they had come to vandalise the station because of its **Manor Munyu** and other programmes discussing the recent developments in the Songor. They threatened to inflict further havoc should the station continue with programmes on the Songor. Since time immemorial the Songor Lagoon, with its salt and fishing riches, has been the most important economic resource in the Ada area. The decision of the Ghana government in 2020 to give monopoly control over all the Lagoon to Electrochem Ghana Ltd, a company owned by a leading member of the ruling NPP, thereby depriving local communities of their access to the Lagoon is a divisive issue in Ada. Persistent heavy handed and brutal police interventions, usually in the company of Electrochem security guards, against perceived critics or opponents of the Electrochem concessions have worsened these divisions and created a climate of distrust and fear in the communities along the lagoon.

Radio Ada, through the Manor Munyu and other programmes in Dangme, has been providing information about and explaining the contents of key documents on the Electrochem deal to the people of Ada and offering a forum for discussing the implications of the Electrochem monopoly. It has been among the first media houses to report the many incidents, including police raids on villages, which regrettably have been triggered by the Electrochem deal. We are in no doubt that as a community media, with the mandate to educate, inform and entertain its audience among others, Radio Ada is fulfilling its mandate in providing

information and analysis on the most important economic and political issue in Ada today, i.e., the Electrochem monopoly of the Songor Lagoon and the issues and controversies it has generated. These issues are not of only local Ada importance but for all Ghanaians given the status of the Lagoon as the single biggest source of salt in West Africa and the many mineral governance issues raised by the Electrochem concessions.

Against this background we are concerned that a statement from the Ada Traditional Council which purports to condemn the attack on Radio Ada, accuses Radio Ada of “broadcasting contents without recourse to the tenets of journalism profession” and which, “destabilises the peaceful atmosphere of the traditional area and incites the youth against each other creating unnecessary tension in the area.” The statement read by the Mankralo of Ada, Nene Agudey Obichere III, a key supporter of the Electrochem deal, offers no evidence in support of this serious allegation even as it calls on the National Media Commission, “to as a matter of urgency take the necessary actions to curtail the excesses of the radio station”. We fully call on Nene Obichere III and the Ada Traditional Council to urgently make public the facts which support their accusations on unprofessional behaviour by Radio Ada which would warrant investigation by the NMC. This is necessary to assure the public that the allegations are part of an honest effort to defend and improve the space and climate for free expression. Otherwise given Nene Obichere’s well known support for Electrochem the unsubstantiated allegations and vehemence of the obvious dislike of Radio Ada’s programming expressed in the Ada Traditional Council’s statement can in themselves inflame tensions.

As we wait for the outcome of investigations by the police and other critical bodies, the NCOM makes the following demands:

1. The assault on Radio Ada be fully investigated with dispatch and culprits brought to book
2. 24-hour security be provided Radio Ada by the state until such a time that the situation is deemed safe.

In conclusion the NCOM reiterates its solidarity with Radio Ada and salutes all community radio stations and their volunteers who are selflessly making important contributions to freedom of expression, strengthening citizenship and the right to information and accountability.