

Minister raises hope on Information Bill - by Tony Akowe, Kaduna

The Minister of Information and National Orientation, Frank Nweke JNR, Tuesday gave assurance that the present government will do all within its power to ensure the passage of the Freedom of Information Bill currently before the National Assembly.

Delivering a keynote address at the 2005 Press Week of the Kaduna Council of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), the Minister said that when passed into law, it is the hope of the government that the law will be used for the betterment of the Nigerian society.

The Freedom of Information Bill has already been passed by the House of Representatives and is currently awaiting its passage by the Senate before being accented to by the President.

Chief Nweke said that the government's resolve to assist in the passage of the Bill was as a result of efforts at encouraging the growth of the Nigerian media industry.

He noted that the present government recognized the role of the media in nation building and believed in the freedom of the press, hence, it would do nothing to muzzle or inhibit this long cherished tradition.

"For every freedom, there must be a corresponding responsibility. It follows, therefore, that in carrying out your duties of educating, informing and entertaining your readers and audience, appropriate discretion must be exercised at all times so that our new born democracy will not be put in jeopardy."

"We as a government have watched the admiration sometimes, not without apprehension avalanche of all manners of publicity that has been unleashed on the nation since the advent of democracy in the last six years" he said.

He reminded the media of its assigned role, which he said would be to keep the government responsible and free from corruption, to render decision makers nationally accountable, which would lead to national judgement in the administration and management of economy and to prevent power from drifting into the hands of self-seekers and corrupt men and women.

In recent times, he said, the Nigerian media have greatly assisted the present government in its war against corruption and other ills that had bedeviled the society.

The minister noted that the events of the past tend to have tested the nation's cohesion, saying "where as it is a futile effort for us to deny unpleasant images of us that are true, it is also irresponsible not to report the positive values we have, because there are always two sides to a coin."