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# Free press ensures free and fair elections, good governance -says Rt. US Senator

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Retired United States Senator Fred C. Whiting, who is currently on visit to the Gambia, yesterday told members of the Gambian media fraternity that a free press in a democratic society ensures free and fair elections and good governance.

The occasion was a lecture held at the Gambia Press Union, where Senator Fred spoke to local journalists on the "The Role Media Plays in US Elections".

Noting that journalists in the US are extremely important, as they contribute to democracy, he said: "The media is the fourth estate or branch of governments; they entertain, educate and inform the public. They also serve as watchdogs where government officers are held accountable. A free press is a prerequisite for socio-economic change in any society."

Senator Fred W. Whiting, who is in the country at the invitation of the US Embassy in Banjul, was accompanied to the GPU office by Cindy Cregg, charge d'Affaires at the US Embassy in Banjul, and Ebrima Jaw Manneh, political and economic assistant, and security cooperation coordinator.

According to Whiting, there are different types of press, but the worst type is the irresponsible press officer. He stated that as a responsible press officer, one's stories must be accurate and reliable, and journalists should never be bias in their reporting.

Fred underscored the pivotal role the media played in the US election in 2008, which saw Barack Obama declared winner.

"Journalists do not only stop at interviewing the politicians, but also do go to the grassroots to conduct interviews with the masses and conduct opinion polls," he added. "Journalists," he went on, "are very vital tools for change."

Mr Whiting, who now works as a political and economic consultant for the US department of state, also underscored the impact the press had during the US election in 2008, and the recent BP oil spill in the coast of America.

He further noted that the most important things in a newspaper are the news and the editorial content. Rt. Senator Whiting also opined that newspapers should not be biased, political or opposition minded. This, he stated, can greatly affect their professionalism and code of conduct.

Whiting, who also spent two years in **South Dakota**'s house of representatives and eight years in the senate, further highlighted in his lecture that the power of a pen is very significant in election reporting, adding that the important role media plays in elections cannot be overemphasised.

"In 2008, we had more than 23 million voters and 52% of them voted in the election. We respect democracy, good governance, rule of law and human rights because these are the real determinants of a democratic state," he asserted.

He also stated that with modern journalism, journalists can access more vital information on the internet, adding that the US constitution guarantees freedom of the press and freedom of expression.

Whiting, however, warned that freedom of speech and expression should not be abused for selfish interests.

Rt. Senator Whiting will today deliver lectures to the members of the Gambia Bar Association on the Topic: "Corporate Governance and its Economic Consequences" at the America Corner situated at the Comium building along Kairaba Avenue.

Later in the evening, he will give another lecture at the same venue, on the topic: "Youths can make a difference in Elections."

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