

Journalists have been urged to avoid turning crime reports into public trials by making conclusions, taking sides or presenting suspects as guilty before courts deliver judgments.

Media experts issued the warning during a three-day training on Crime Reporting organized by Fojo Media Institute in partnership with AFRI-MEDIA Ltd, held from July 22 to 24, 2026, at TR5 Resort Hotel in Runda, Kamonyi District.

The training brought together journalists from different media organizations in Rwanda to strengthen ethical and professional standards in reporting crime and justice matters.

Counsel Jean Paul Ibambe, a legal expert and media law specialist, said journalists must remember that their role is to inform the public, not to perform the duties of investigators, prosecutors or judges.

“A journalist is not a criminal investigator, not a prosecutor, not a judge, and not a court official. The role of a journalist is to provide information, not to make decisions or pass judgment,” Ibambe said.

He warned that careless reporting can damage the reputation of individuals who may later be found innocent, especially when journalists publish names, photographs or other identifying details without following cases to their conclusion.

Ibambe encouraged journalists to report final court decisions after publishing reports about suspects, saying that failing to do so may leave the public with a negative perception of someone who was never convicted.

Jean Baptiste Micomyiza, a journalist with more than 20 years of experience, urged reporters to build their stories on verified facts and evidence rather than emotions or assumptions.

He also challenged the growing practice of labeling some reports as “advocacy stories,” saying journalists should be careful because advocacy often involves supporting a particular side.

“When you call it advocacy, it becomes something different. You cannot do advocacy without taking a side. A journalist must remain in the middle and work in the public interest,” Micomyiza said.

He said stories about vulnerable people can still be reported, but journalists should obtain consent, protect dignity and avoid promising sources that publication will automatically solve their problems.

Senior journalist Marie Louise Uwizeyimana advised journalists covering sensitive issues to choose their words carefully and avoid creating the impression that they support one party.

She emphasized the need to protect human rights, especially those of children and people with disabilities.

Yvan Ngabiwe who attended the training said the lessons would help them improve crime reporting by verifying information, giving all sides a voice and following cases until their conclusion.

The organizers said the training is part of efforts to promote responsible journalism that strengthens public understanding of justice while protecting the rights of individuals.