

3 May | 09

Kigali Declaration of Eastern Africa
Conference on Media, Dialogue, Mutual
Understanding and Reconciliation

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We, leaders and representatives of journalists trade unions and press freedom organizations from Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Tanzania, Seychelles, Comoros, Rwanda and Burundi, meeting at the Eastern Africa Conference on Media, Dialogue, Mutual Understanding and Reconciliation organized by the Eastern Africa Journalists Association with the support of UNESCO, International Freedom of Expression eXchange (IFEX) and Open Society Institute, held at the Kigali Serena Hotel, Kigali, Rwanda from 2 May to 3 May 2009;

Alive to the conference theme of Media, Dialogue, Mutual Understanding and Reconciliation;

Taking into consideration the significant role that media play in the promotion and consolidation of dialogue, reconciliation, mutual understating, peace, human rights, good governance, democracy and rule of law;

Reaffirming that freedom of expression is a fundamental right, and essential to the realization of other freedoms set forth in international human rights instruments;

Acknowledging the Declarations of Maputo, of Medellin, of Windhoek, of Alma-Ata, of Sana'a, of Santiago, of Dakar and of Sofia, which stress that establishment, maintenance and fostering of an independent, pluralistic and free press is essential for democracy and for development;

Reiterating our strong condemnation of violence and animosity against journalists and other forms of harassment of journalists and other media workers, particularly the killing in cold blood of journalists and detention of media professionals incommunicado;

Recognizing that freedom of expression and access to information are essential to democratic discourse and open and informed debate, thereby fostering government transparency, accountability, peoples' empowerment, mutual understanding, reconciliation and citizens' participation in governance;

Extremely concerned about the great individual risks and dangers journalists in Eastern Africa face, including harassment, cruel and degrading punishments, torture, intimidation, death threats, imprisonment, abductions, arbitrary arrests, killings and unlawful detention;

Deeply disturbed that media professionals in Eastern Africa are often subjected to statements that degenerate and dishearten them such as smear campaigns, political persecution, vilification and constant surveillance;

Recognizing the importance of solidarity and cooperation among media professionals as a vital source of protection for freedom of the press and the

right to free expression;

Deeply concerned with the appalling working conditions in which Eastern Africa journalists operate and the specific risks that women journalists face such as sexual harassment, gender discrimination, pressure exerted upon women journalists by different actors;

Remembering the journalists and other media professionals who have lost their lives, have risked death, have been imprisoned and/or are facing other forms of harassment;

Thankful to the Eastern Africa Journalists Association and its affiliate Rwanda Journalists Association for organizing and hosting this conference;

Grateful to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) for supporting journalists and the media in Eastern Africa and its strong participation of this conference;

APPEAL TO:

Governments in Eastern Africa to recognize the legitimacy and important role that media play in the promotion and consolidation of dialogue, mutual understanding, reconciliation, peace, human rights, good governance, democracy and rule of law;

Governments in Eastern Africa to do all they can to provide basic security and freedoms for journalists.

Governments in Eastern Africa to reform media laws and other restrictive laws regarding media freedom, right to free expression and civil society organizations in conformity with international and regional standards that safeguard freedom of expression and support the role of media and free expression community;

Governments in Eastern Africa to support the work of journalists unions and press freedom organizations for the protection of media professionals and to develop a climate of respect for the work of media;

Governments in Eastern Africa to urgently put in place legal and policy guarantees to ensure safety and security of journalists and media establishments, and to stop the culture of impunity following criminal acts against journalists and media organs;

Governments in Eastern Africa to pay particular attention to the situation of media freedom in their respective countries and to support the efforts of the media community in the promotion and protection of press freedom and freedom of expression;

Governments in Eastern Africa to vigorously implement commitments to freedom of expression through a legal and regulatory environment that respects

press freedom and independence, and enables media diversity;

Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East Africa Community (EAC) to engage in dialogue with governments in Eastern Africa and media community with a view to protecting media freedom and the right to free expression;

The international community, governments, inter-governmental organizations and UN specialized agencies, donor organizations, UN Field Presences and Country Teams working in Eastern Africa to include in their strategies and programmes, the promotion of independent media, safety of journalist, ethics & professionalism and support for journalists groups and press freedom organizations in Eastern Africa;

DECIDE:

1. To collect information on abuses against journalists and media in Eastern Africa and to bring the abuses to the urgent attention of the appropriate authorities and organizations for swift remedy and reactions.
2. To work to persuade governments and other actors to uphold universal human rights standards, particularly the right to free expression.
3. To coordinate and deliver campaigning on collective bargaining and ethical journalism in the media in Eastern Africa.
4. To communicate accurate and action-oriented media freedom violations information to bring national, regional and international pressure.
5. To promote the role of media as a platform for dialogue, reconciliation and mutual understanding.
6. To provide first hand assistance and protection to journalists at immediate risk in collaboration with regional and international organizations.
7. To carry out effective and collective campaign against culture of impunity in the media industry and undemocratic media laws as well as other restrictive laws.

Done in Kigali, Rwanda, 03 May 2009