

## **Launching of MIL week to African regulators in ACRAN/RIARC**

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### **UNESCO**

Broadcast regulators play a pivotal role in enabling broadcast pluralism and therefore in influencing whether people can choose amongst a range of public-service, private and community stations on air, and a variety of programming that links to such institutions.

On top of the traditional functions related to licensing allocation in the public interest, nowadays regulators are increasingly called to undertake new tasks, for example concerning the digital terrestrial (DTT) transition. And, among the new functions, like in the case in Morocco, there is also the promotion of Media and information literacy.

In this regard, the Moroccan regulator HACA deserves to be warmly applauded for awarding a one-week temporary licence to the world's first "Radio MIL". This innovative step is allowing a team of young people to learn and produce vibrant radio programming, which then stimulates interaction with the listening public in Rabat on what MIL means and why it is important.

Further, in hosting this major event today, the HACA is putting on the agenda for discussion how MIL relates to the issue of child protection. Some thoughts for this discussion:

You as African regulators know full well how communications regulation from colonial times was deployed to suppress basic human rights and freedoms – including those of African children. Your challenge today is to ensure that regulation never repeats that kind of abuse.

We can celebrate today that the norm for communications is the free flow of information and ideas, based on the right to freedom of expression; and that any limitation – such as a particular parameter as may be applied through regulation – should constitute the exception. This means using regulation judiciously so that its limiting dimensions do prevent abuses of expression yet without such limits themselves becoming violations of the very right itself.

To do this balancing act, we know from international human rights law that any limitations on expression, like through regulation, need to be manifestly necessary, proportionate and for legitimate purpose. Such purposes, as recognized in

international rights law, can be for public safety, the rights of others – such as the rights of children, and for public morality. At the same time, the UN's Human Rights Committee has cautioned us to avoid putting a single morality over other moralities when in a pluralistic society.

Regulation, as I don't have to tell you, is therefore a complex business!

There is further context, however, for how you as regulators make decisions that impact on the right to freedom of expression. This is that freedom of expression is also more than a right – it is now also recognized as a contributor to the world's sustainable development agenda.

I refer you here to Sustainable Development Goal 16.10, which calls for “public access to information and fundamental freedoms”. It is in relation to achieving this wonderful objective, that you can see how important it is to have MIL.

**In a nutshell, without the freedoms to produce and circulate such information, AND without the MIL competencies to access and interact with this information, we will not achieve the package of progress for our shared goals on gender equality, sustainable cities, environmental protection, etc.**

Turning to these competencies, a key, even fundamental, literacy is each individual, child – youth – adult, knowing their rights to freedom of expression and access to information. In recent times you have probably heard of people increasingly speaking about the need for digital literacy. With the avalanche of disinformation called “fake news”, there are also now calls for “news literacy”. Given the growing problems of digital viruses, ransomware, hacking and arbitrary surveillance, we are all being urged to become cybersecurity literate. With the need to protect your privacy, and to respect that of others, there is also now a need to enhance our privacy literacy. In short, these and many additional kinds of competencies are needed to make the most out of our new world of communications.

Together, all these capacities can be grouped under UNESCO's composite concept of MIL – an umbrella that spans the complementary dimensions of relevant and distinct literacies. MIL allows for a holistic approach.

It is this view of MIL which offers regulators a concrete and valuable response to help address the rights of children to expression, access to information, and to protection. As such, MIL is about preparing children for this new world of information, something that only seeking to shield them from it cannot do. It is about building defenses in the minds of children, and strengthening their capacity to use communications for individual and societal benefit.

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Broadly speaking, because MIL increasingly has to deal with digital information issues, it touches on the Internet, and Internet governance. MIL therefore, like other Internet issues, is best approached within a multi-stakeholder framework given the complexity of this global resource. Children and youth are also nowadays stakeholders here.

This observation is especially relevant to you as regulators because many of you are also increasingly solicited on issues related to ‘regulating’ (so-called) “web-media / online-media”. While of course it is nowadays difficult to distinguish what is online media from ‘traditional’ media, what we must always keep in mind is that “the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online” as per the UN Human Rights Council’s resolution 32 adopted in 2016. So too with the issue of children’s rights – they need to be respected and protected online.

This rights-based perspective also underpins UNESCO’s approach to internet-related issues, and supports our Internet Universality principles that promote a Human Rights-based, Open internet, which is Accessible to all and characterized by Multistakeholder participation (R.O.A.M). It is within these principles, that UNESCO sees the relevance of MIL – and in particular its relevance to the principle of accessibility. At present UNESCO is developing indicators for these principles, including with sensitivity to what each means for both children and youth. I encourage you to visit the UNESCO website to find more about this concept that is so relevant to your work.

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In summing up, it is evident that for advancing public access to information and fundamental freedoms, through your institutions, you have a valuable role to play in the growing MIL movement. Morocco has shown what one can do with RADIOMIL. Other options are to expand outreach to the public to explain the why and how of your regulatory activities. It might even be considered to insert, in the broadcast licenses that you award to particular entities, obligations for contributing to MIL.

Let me recall that the theme for UNESCO World Press Freedom Day on 3 May 2017 has been: “Critical Minds for Critical Times: Media’s role in advancing peaceful, just and inclusive societies”, Those critical minds are precisely fueled by MIL.

Next year, the main commemoration of World Press Freedom Day will bring many of us to Ghana to explore the linkages between Media, Justice and the Rule of law. UNESCO hopes to see many of you on such occasion, where discussions focused on media and information literacy, and the rights of children – as well as the role of audiovisual regulators in these regards, will surely take place.

*Thank you! Merci! Shukran!*