

## Celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Windhoek Declaration

The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), the Government of the Republic of Namibia, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), and the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN/IFRA) are celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the **Windhoek Declaration**, which culminated in 03 May 1991, being declared World Press Freedom Day by the United Nations General Assembly.

To assess the 1991 Windhoek Declaration in terms of African media history requires recognising that this seminal document came from the hearts of journalists. Generally around the world, but in Sub-Saharan Africa especially, journalism is bound up with idealism. This is notwithstanding the many persuasions and pressures that can lead its practitioners to fall short of the ideal. The desire to strive for the best applies to even the most constrained journalists, who – when they set aside any self-rationalisations – would invariably prefer to do the right thing journalistically. To this end, they hunger to be free of distorting controls by government officials, politicians and unscrupulous bosses. This idealistic motivation includes even the most underpaid reporter at a private outlet who persistently supplements his or her erratic income with bribes. It is also something which supercedes most other senses of identity that an African journalist may have, at least in terms of aspirations. It is central to the appeal of being a true journalist who works as a professional to serve the noble cause of circulating information in the public interest. It is this idealism that underpins the power of the Windhoek Declaration.

For this reason MISA will, along with its development partners, host the Windhoek +20 Conference, under the theme: **Media in Africa 20 Years On: Our Past, Present and Future**, in Windhoek on 5 and 6 May 2011. In doing so, MISA hopes to provide a platform to allow media practitioners from across the continent to reflect on the past 20 years, but also discuss current developments and how to overcome envisaged future challenges.

A highlight of our celebrations is the Inaugural Judge John Oliver Manyarara Memorial Lecture that honours the legacy of the late Judge Manyarara, who was a champion of media freedom and a founding member of the MISA Trust Fund Board.

The conference will be preceded by the re-launch of the Southern African Editors Forum (SAEF); and a consultation with African editors on the Declaration of Table Mountain Campaign on May 4, also in Windhoek.

In preparation for the event, and to sensitize the public about the importance of press freedom, freedom of expression, pluralism and tolerance as sources for democratic debate, 5 public announcement spots about the Windhoek Declaration on Promoting Independent and Pluralistic Media was produced and translated into English, Oshiwambo, Otjiherero, Damara>Nama and Afrikaans.

They were based on the ideas and opinions of young people on the Windhoek Declaration and produced by Base FM, a community radio station based in Katutura. They will however also be broadcasted by other community radio stations in Namibia. These PSAs are an important instrument for engagement with media and other information providers in understanding key concepts such as Freedom of Expression, and fundamental rights enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Today, World Press Freedom Day is celebrated in over 100 countries. Namibians should be proud of the role they played in the advancement of media freedom, independence and pluralism.

[www.misa.org](http://www.misa.org)

<http://wpfd20.blogspot.com/>

[www.windhoekplus20.org](http://www.windhoekplus20.org)

<http://www.wpfd2011.org>