



• 2nd Floor, 7 St. David's Office Park, St David's Place, Parktown • P O Box 47184, Parklands, 2121 •
• Tel 011 484 3630 / 3617 • Fax 011 484 3593 • 046 338 NPO • www.sanef.org.za • director@sanef.org.za •

SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL EDITORS' FORUM SUBMISSION

ON AU-EU PROPOSAL FOR A PAN- AFRICAN MEDIA OBSERVATORY

The South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposal for a Pan-African Media Observatory.

Sanef is the main representative of South African media professionals - editors and journalists - now in its 13th year of existence. It was formed in 1996 from elements of the former Conference of Editors and Black Editors' Forum. Sanef subscribes to the Constitutional Principles of freedom of expression and freedom of the press and other media, and it has played an active role over the years in promoting a climate of free expression and transparency in a democratic South Africa, upholding journalism professionalism and ethics and the promotion of the highest standards of editorial practice.

In addition to the above, Sanef has been a catalyst in encouraging the formation of editors' councils across the continent, and in the formation of the Southern African Editors Forum (covering the SA Development Community countries), and The African Editors Forum.

General View

Sanef is deeply concerned about the Pan-African Media Observatory proposal as currently formulated.

1. We assess the proposed body as being structurally dominated by governments and government-controlled media. As such, this would not be a credible or neutral agency in terms of the proposed role of mediating conflicts around media issues.
2. We are further concerned that the proposed task of mediation is not appropriate. This is because it:
 - a. Ignores the wider need to reform the legal conditions within which media operates in African countries, which reform would create a climate where the role of the media is respected by all parties. The raft of repression that many journalists face in Africa, and with the one-sided bias of most state-owned media, is simply a recipe for generating conflicts.
 - b. Ignores the need for solutions to conflicts to be located within the universal best practice of self-regulatory systems for the media. Such voluntary systems, existing in each African country, need to be fostered, rather than overshadowed by a pan-African body that is remote from the complexities of local situations.
3. The notion of the Observatory providing a portal to research on African media is also worrying. Given the proposed governance of the body, the credibility of such research would be questioned. Instead, support for African media researchers and university journalism schools would more appropriately generate new knowledge on media around the continent.
4. We believe that the proposal to create a pan-African media charter through this Observatory serves to marginalise key African declarations such as the Windhoek Declaration and the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression Africa. We draw particular attention to a further document in which Sanef was directly involved in developing: namely, the Declaration of Table Mountain which calls for the elimination of "insult" and

criminal defamation laws in the 48 (of the 53) countries of Africa which still have these laws on their statute books. This Declaration was adopted at the World Association of Newspapers (16,000 members newspapers throughout the world) conference in Cape Town in June 2007 in the presence of then President Thabo Mbeki and has subsequently been adopted by the SA National Editors' Forum, Media Institute of Southern Africa, Freedom of Expression Institute, SA, and PEN International.

It is our submission that the AU-EU ought to put resources into ensuring the implementation and observance of these declarations, rather than proposing a new set of standards. Such resourcing could be allocated to activities aimed at this objective. Amongst these could be to support related-initiatives around the annual marking of May 3, which is World Press Freedom Day. This anniversary commemorates a major contribution to the world's consciousness and it originated with African journalists and editors. The AU-EU would do well to drop the idea of the Observatory, and instead help to build media freedom and development in Africa by focussed attention on expanding the impact of May 3 around the continent each year.

Finally, Sanef urges the AU-EU to make this and other submissions on the proposal public, by way of posting them on your website. This will add to transparency and debate around media freedom and development in Africa.

Yours faithfully,

Jovial Rantao
SANEF Chairperson

Thabo Leshilo
SANEF Media Freedom Subcommittee Chair