

THE NAMIBIAN MEDIA OMBUDSMAN

Statement presented at the SIXTH ANNUAL MISA MEDIA AWARDS CEREMONY on 06 October 2010 in Windhoek

Directors of Ceremonies

Minister of Information and Communication Technology, Honourable Joël Kapaanda

Members of the Media

Chairperson and National Director of Misa Namibia

Invited Guest

Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for this invitation to share some information on the office of the media ombudsman.

There are a number of natural synergies between the principles and values of Misa and the self-regulatory mechanism as administered by the media ombudsman in Namibia. Too mention just a few:

- Media professionalism and the observance of ethical standards in media products that seek to inform, empower, educate and entertain;
- Citizens' right to access to information in order to enhance transparency and citizen participation in government, judiciary and legislative issues;
- Participatory democracy, respect for human rights, equality, human dignity, freedom and non-discrimination; and
- Gender equality in and through the media and society

At such an occasion it is important to reflect on the role of the media in the broader Namibian society. Namibia, generally, has a peaceful and stable environment that is conducive to the flourishing of the media and the practice of the media profession. The media should use this opportunity to strengthen its role in society and to contribute meaningfully to the deepening of democracy and human rights in our country. It should also diversify its activities to allow active participation of the general public in media activities and freedom of expression. It should also encourage and instil professionalism and ethical conduct in its members.

The adoption of the Code of Ethics for the Namibian media, therefore, is a point in the right direction. The Media Ombudsman is part of the self-regulatory mechanism of the Namibian media adopted by the Editors Forum of Namibia (EFN). The EFN appointed the Media Ombudsman in August 2009 and the office was formally launched in November 2009.

The role of the Media Ombudsman is to administer the complaints procedures in terms of the code of ethics for the Namibian media, to receive and deal with complaints, try to mediate a settlement between the parties, serve as a member of the media complaints committee and refer complaints to the Appeals Chairperson in case of appeals.

So far the Media Ombudsman has received support and good cooperation from the majority of media houses, the EFN and MISA. The office received and dealt with 17 complaints during the first year, of which the majority was resolved. It would be arrogant and dangerous to say that the present system of self-regulation is perfect and the operation of the office of the Media Ombudsman have no shortcomings or cannot improve. We constantly need to improve our performance to address the needs of all members of the Namibian society in its cultural, social, economic and political diversity. The Code of Ethics for the Namibian media is a noble document, but unless it becomes entrenched in our work as media practitioners, it will not improve professionalism, accuracy, fairness and balance in our reporting. We should also accept constructive criticism from all quarters to ensure that we remain relevant and progressive in the social, economic and political milieu.

As part of the improvement of the office of the Media Ombudsman over the next twelve months, certain proposals were made to the EFN Annual General Meeting on 01 October 2010. The following will be implemented:

- The administrative capacity will be enhanced to deal more effectively with complaints.
- Interaction with government officials and politicians to ensure better understanding of the role of the Media Ombudsman.
- Cooperation between the Media Ombudsman and all editors should be improved and maintained.
- Outreach visits to the different regions should be accelerated. This should be supported by user friendly information and publicity materials.
- Involvement of the Media Complaints Committee in its activities, without creating a conflict of interest situation.
- Secure long-term funding for outreach activities and administrative capacity.

With these few words I thank you and wish you a joyous evening of celebrations. Congratulations to those who will receive awards tonight. May this be encouragement to yourself and others, to always strive for excellence.



Clement Daniels
Media Ombudsman