

## **Conference on "Role and Place of Media in the Information Society in Africa and the Arab States"**

**Marrakech (Morocco), 22 – 24 November, 2004**

### **Action Plan**

The Marrakech Conference recommends the following measures:

#### **1. Media freedom, independence and pluralism and the challenge of cyber security**

- Proceed without delay to the general reform of laws limiting the right of freedom expression and opinion.
- Request Arab and African States that have not already done so to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 and incorporate its principles and values of freedom expression and the right to information into their constitutions.
- Revise and strengthen the human rights mechanisms of the United Nations dealing with freedom of expression and information and create practical follow-up and implementation procedures for the recommendations of those mechanisms.
- Guarantee that all foreign aid to Arab and African states is conditioned on the respect for freedom of expression and the right of access to Internet.
- Support and fund public media only when they are editorially independent and where their independence and the right to freedom of information and expression is guaranteed.
- Free prisoners of opinion, in jail for having made peaceable use of Internet, immediately and unconditionally.
- Permit independent and community media to exist without prior political conditions, except when their contents involve pedophilia, racism or are intended to incite violence or terrorism.
- Invite media organizations to adopt norms and standards, as well as ethical codes, to reinforce the rule of law and freedom of expression.
- Protect the right of Arab and African journalists to create independent unions and associations, and support the creation of Arab and African national and regional NGOs in the field of Internet freedom.

## **2. The place of traditional and new media in the information society**

- Emphasize the key role of the media and communicators in the information society, and ensure that professionals in these areas receive training in the use of ICTs.
- Recognize the status of online journalists and grant them the same economic and social rights as other journalists in traditional media.
- Improve coordination with regard to the role of the media and freedom of speech in the African information society in conjunction with several African projects (NEPAD, NICI) currently underway.
- Develop print and electronic media, independent of governments and encouraging pluralism and editorial independence, by getting donors to provide international assistance in African and Arab countries.
- Transform existing state-owned broadcasting services and news agencies into open public service institutions by getting governments to set targets to grant statutes of journalistic and editorial independence.
- Get African governments to implement the provisions in this respect, which are set out in the Declaration on Freedom of Expression of the African Commission on Human and Political Rights.
- Allow for independent community broadcasting services where these are currently not permitted and ensure their equitable access to spectrum by getting governments to set targets for opening up broadcasting licensing opportunities.
- Include the greatest number of marginalized communities by getting governments and donors to go beyond pilot projects on community access to information and commit themselves to upscale, successful projects.
- Promote the establishment, by governments, of independent funding mechanisms to support pluralistic media, including community media.
- Improve and expand facilities for training journalists, managers and other media practitioners without discrimination, with a view to upgrading their professional standards.
- Encourage the establishment of national and regional networks to monitor and act against violations of free expression, create knowledge banks and provide advice and technical assistance in media development.

## **3. Reducing the digital divide in the media**

- Turn the existing digital divide in the media into a digital opportunity by making training in basic literacy and ICT skills, and specifically training of trainers in Africa and the Arab world, a key goal in the struggle to empower media professionals.

- Encourage donor governments and international organizations to participate in multilateral and bilateral training partnerships in such a way as to ensure that capacity building is sustainable after donor programs come to an end.
- Acknowledge the critical role of governments in developing nations in creating an environment conducive to skill transfers and building suitable ICT infrastructures in their own countries.
- Support, with private and public subsidies, the development of independent media websites and contribute to the training of journalists in online journalism techniques.
- Raise the relative priority of ICT projects in requests for funding by governments of developing countries from developed countries and international agencies.

#### **4. Women media professionals**

- Support the equal participation of women in the media through training and employment measures that counter discrimination.
- Develop specific projects based on a collaboration of educational institutions, governments and ICT suppliers to increase young women's access to ICTs, particularly computers, with a view to promoting independent learning.
- Adopt policies in consultation with governments to promote the employment of local women and men in the media and communications industries throughout the region and the establishment of reasonable expectations for employment and career development.
- Establish collaborative networks of women across the region with the specific purpose of promoting best practice, role models, policy development, training programs and innovative projects to support the employment of women using ICTs and further the values of the UN Millennium Development Goals.
- Support the development of online media content dealing with questions involving the rights of women, children and senior citizens and with the problems of local and community development.
- Continue support for the Composite ICT Development Index to ensure equitable training and employment opportunities for women in media and ICTs.

#### **5. Culture, multilingualism and the media in the information society**

- Reaffirm multilingualism as a crucial, fundamental component in the building of an open and inclusive information society.
- Encourage the development of technical standards for digitally processing local or international languages on the Internet.

- Develop and promote the use of digital contents appropriate to local contexts/sounds and images, and for peoples that have oral cultural traditions.
- Encourage the production and dissemination of content that furthers the promotion and enhancement of cultural heritage.
- Introduce a multilingual structure in the basic educational systems of African and Arab countries, enabling their populations to make proper use of multiple languages in the information society.
- Support and encourage action by specialized institutions in the language area, notably the African Academy of Languages and the House of Human Sciences, on a national, regional and continental basis.
- Encourage and contribute to the creation of a database that retrieves available contents and potential sources of funding. It will help build a pluralistic, multilingual and multicultural information society.

## **6. Internet governance**

- Reach a broad agreement that ensures inclusive and adequate governance processes, where decisions are taken that further the potential of the Internet for Africa and African media in particular, while enhancing the African heritage.
- Identify the needs for an overall African response to the challenges inherent to Internet governance while recognizing the international framework for the governance of the Internet; such a coordinated African effort could help bridge national and international approaches to the Internet.
- Separate Internet infrastructure and accessibility issues into technical and management issues; Internet content issues may require a different governance structure.
- Adopt a multi-stakeholder approach with regard to the structure of Internet governance; such a broad approach would include, among its stakeholders, media as an institution, women as a social group, and other user groups.
- Make the transition to the information society by translating African languages into technical codes for Internet usage and promoting literacy, including computer literacy; as regards African media, a proactive strategy needs to be developed to give traditional media an online presence.
- Ensure that Internet service providers are independent of public authorities and not found legally responsible for the content of the online media they service.
- \* Protect the communication privacy of journalists who subscribe to the electronic message services of ISPs; the work of private and public Internet servers should be transparent and respect the privacy of consumers.