

AFRICAN CHARTER ON BROADCASTING

The Charter was adopted by media practitioners at a UNESCO Conference held on 3-5 May 2001 in Windhoek, Namibia, called to celebrate the Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic Press, reprinted above. Available at www.article19.org

Acknowledging the enduring relevance and importance of the Windhoek Declaration to the protection and promotion of freedom of expression and of the media;

Noting that freedom of expression includes the right to communicate and access to means of communication;

Mindful of the fact that the Windhoek Declaration focuses on the print media and recalling Paragraph 17 of the Windhoek Declaration, which recommended that a similar seminar be convened to address the need for independence and pluralism in radio and television broadcasting;

Recognising that the political, economic and technological environment in which the Windhoek Declaration was adopted has changed significantly and that there is a need to complement and expand upon the original Declaration;

Aware of the existence of serious barriers to free, independent and pluralistic broadcasting and to the right to communicate through broadcasting in Africa;

Cognisant of the fact that for the vast majority of the peoples of Africa, the broadcast media remains the main source of public communication and information;

Recalling the fact that the frequency spectrum is a public resource which must be managed in the public interest;

We the participants of Windhoek + 10 declare that:

PART I: GENERAL REGULATORY ISSUES

1. The legal framework for broadcasting should include a clear statement of the principles underpinning broadcast regulation, including promoting respect for freedom of expression, diversity, and the free flow of information and ideas, as well as a three-tier system for broadcasting: public service, commercial and community.
2. All formal powers in the areas of broadcast and telecommunications regulation should be exercised by public authorities which are protected against interference, particularly of a political or economic nature, by, among other things, an appointments process for members which is open, transparent, involves the participation of civil society, and is not controlled by any particular political party.
3. Decision-making processes about the overall allocation of the frequency spectrum should be open and participatory, and ensure that a fair proportion of the spectrum is allocated to broadcasting uses. The frequencies allocated to broadcasting should be shared equitably among the three tiers of broadcasting.
4. Licensing processes for the allocation of specific frequencies to individual broadcasters should be fair and transparent, and based on clear criteria which include promoting media diversity in ownership and content.
5. Broadcasters should be required to promote and develop local content, which should be defined to include African content, including through the introduction of minimum quotas. States should promote an economic environment that facilitates the development of independent production and diversity in broadcasting.
6. The development of appropriate technology for the reception of broadcasting signals should be promoted.

PART II: PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

1. All state and government controlled broadcasters should be transformed into public service broadcasters, that are accountable to all strata of the people as represented by an independent board, and that serve the overall public interest, avoiding one-sided reporting and programming in regard to religion, political belief, culture, race and gender.
2. Public service broadcasters should, like broadcasting and telecommunications regulators, be governed by bodies which are protected against interference.
3. The public service mandate of public service broadcasters should be clearly defined.
4. The editorial independence of public service broadcasters should be guaranteed.
5. Public service broadcasters should be adequately funded in a manner that protects them from arbitrary interference with their budgets.

6. Without detracting from editorial control over news and current affairs content and in order to promote the development of independent productions and to enhance diversity in programming, public service broadcasters should be required to broadcast minimum quotas of material by independent producers.
7. The transmission infrastructure used by public service broadcasters should be made accessible to all broadcasters under reasonable and non-discriminatory terms.

PART III: COMMUNITY BROADCASTING

1. Community broadcasting is broadcasting which is for, by and about the community, whose ownership and management is representative of the community, which pursues a social development agenda, and which is non-profit.
2. There should be a clear recognition, including by the international community, of the difference between decentralised public broadcasting and community broadcasting.
3. The right of community broadcasters to have access to the Internet, for the benefit of their respective communities, should be promoted.

PART IV: TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND CONVERGENCE

4. The right to communicate includes access to telephones, email, Internet and other telecommunications systems, including through the promotion of community-controlled information communication technology centres.
5. Telecommunications law and policy should promote the goal of universal service and access, including through access clauses in privatisation and liberalisation processes, and proactive measures by the state.
6. The international community and African governments should mobilise resources for funding research to keep abreast of the rapidly changing media and technology landscape in Africa. African governments should promote the development of online media and African content, including through the formulation of non-restrictive policies on new information and communications technologies.
7. Training of media practitioners in electronic communication, research and publishing skills needs to be supported and expanded, in order to promote access to, and dissemination of, global information.