Inaugural meeting of **African Media Councils** and the establishment of a **Network of Independent Media Councils in Africa** (NIMCA)

Report on the meetings and events hosted by the Press Council of South Africa in Cape Town from 14 to 17 May 2024

AFRICAN MEDIA COUNCILS

Front page picture: Prof Guy Berger facilitating the AMC meeting

Overview

This report summarises a series of meetings held in Cape Town, South Africa, from 14 to 17 May 2024, focussing on media regulation and self-regulation in Africa. Key discussions revolved around the challenges faced by independent media councils in Africa, the need for a network to support these councils, and the impact of digital platforms on media content regulation.

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Latiefa Mobara

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Latiefa Mobara, executive director of the Press Council of South Africa

Representatives of media councils from East, West and Southern Africa and other delegates were hosted by the Press Council of South Africa, with financial and other support from UNESCO, MENAR, KAS and Nitida.

Contents

Executive summary

This report summarises the African Media Councils (AMC) events and meetings hosted by the Press Council of South Africa in Cape Town from 14 to 17 May, 2024, focussing on media regulation and self-regulation in Africa. The meetings included the AMC meeting, the Organization of News Ombudsmen and Standards Editors (ONO) conference, and a UNESCO-led workshop.

Key discussions revolved around the challenges faced by independent media councils in Africa, the need for a network to support these councils, and the impact of digital platforms on media content regulation. The report also highlights a presentation of a case study from Zimbabwe on promoting ethical journalism and peaceful elections.

It provides an overview of a UNESCO-led workshop on guidelines for content regulation in the digital age.

Recommendations include the strengthening of collaboration among media councils, advocating for policy changes, addressing the challenges of the digital age, and exploring sustainable funding models.

Establishing the Network of Independent Media Councils in Africa (NIMCA) was a significant outcome, aiming to strengthen self-regulation and promote professional journalism standards across the continent. The presentation of the UNESCO "Social Media 4 Peace" project also emphasised the importance of addressing harmful content online and promoting peace through multi-stakeholder collaboration.

The report is structured as follows:

Introduction

Section 1: Models, Codes, Funding, and Challenges of African Media Councils

Section 2: The Newly Established Network of Independent African Media Councils

Section 3: Media and Platform Content Regulation in the Digital Age

Section 4: Fostering Peace and Ethics in Media – Lessons from Zimbabwe

Conclusion

The **annexures** list the conference delegates, provide the AMC meeting agenda and the media statement on the establishment of the Network of Independent Media Councils in Africa.

Introduction

The Press Council of South Africa hosted a series of events and meetings for African media councils in Cape Town from 14 to 17 May 2024. The first such gathering for media councils on the continent, it was attended by delegates from a number of independent content regulatory bodies to foster dialogue and collaboration.

Both voluntary self-regulatory bodies and statutory regulators were invited to attend, the latter as long as their decision-making powers were guaranteed by law to be independent from government, even if they were fully or partly government funded. In the end, mandated representatives from 13 councils from East, West and Southern Africa attended (including a few online participants), with a good mix of voluntary and statutory bodies, reflective of the different media regulatory models on the continent (see **Annexure 1**).

 The objectives of the meetings were to:

- Understand how media councils operate and function in other countries and the challenges they face.

- Strengthen self-regulation of media content in Africa by fostering communication and the exchange of information between media councils.

- Create a community of practice among diverse self-regulation leaders across African countries.

- Understand how self-regulation fits into the broader drive for platform regulation.

The events included the African Media Councils (AMC) meeting on 15 May, the Organization of News Ombudsmen and Standards Editors (ONO) conference on 16 and 17 May, and a UNESCO-led workshop on 17 May (see **Annexure 2**). These meetings were important milestones towards enhancing the role of independent media councils in Africa, promoting best practice, and addressing challenges in media content regulation.

This report aims to summarise the key discussions from these meetings and highlight the proposed ways to strengthen media self-regulation in Africa. The report aims to provide a comprehensive but concise overview of the initiatives and collaborative efforts discussed during the events. It is structured as follows:

- **Section 1**: This section explores the diversity of media council models, their challenges and the importance of collaboration and sharing of best practice.

- **Section 2**: This section discusses the newly established Network, its potential benefits, and the next steps.

- **Section 3**: Media and Platform Content Regulation in the Digital Age: This section highlights key insights from the UNESCO workshop on digital platform governance and social media regulation.

- **Section 4**: Fostering Peace and Ethics in Media – Lessons from Zimbabwe: This section presents a case study on Zimbabwe's efforts in promoting ethical journalism and its relevance to other African countries.

- **Conclusion**: The conclusion reiterates the importance of self-regulation, summarises the main recommendations, and emphasises the need for ongoing dialogue and collaboration among African media councils.

Section 1

Models, Codes, Funding, and Challenges of African Media Councils

Ahead of the May 2024 meetings, representatives of the invited media councils had to complete a questionnaire detailing their governance structures, funding sources and challenges. Delegates at the events fleshed out these details at the hybrid meetings. A summary of the key findings is outlined in this section.

Regulatory status of the 11 bodies which completed the pre-meeting surveys

There is a wide variety of governance structures and appointment procedures across media councils and regulators, with major differences not only between voluntary and statutory bodies, but also within each type of regulatory model. As an example, co-regulatory systems can be between government and the media, or between the media and the public.
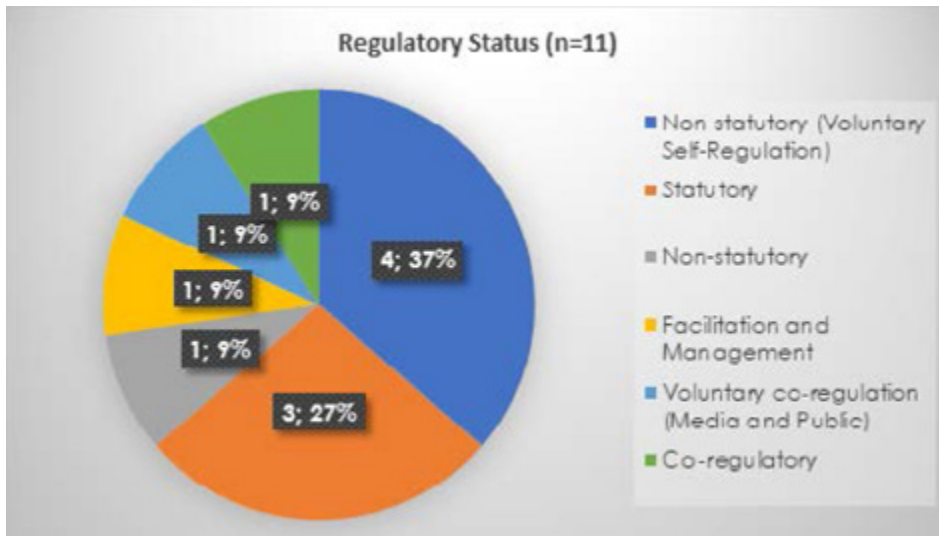
Many organisations reported having a general assembly or membership body comprising media institutions, journalists, and stakeholders. This body often elects a board or governing council which is usually the main decision-making body responsible for policy, oversight, and appointments. Within the structure are specialised committees such as ethics, finance, and regulation to handle specific areas of responsibility. In statutory bodies government officials or external bodies may sometimes appoint certain members or leaders. Across the councils, a team of staff is usually led by an Executive Director or Secretary responsible for carrying out the day-to-day operations.

Some examples of appointment procedures:

- The Media Council of Uganda uses a competitive recruitment process for executive positions. It has a 13-member council with representation from various sectors. Its Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson are elected internally.

- The Zimbabwe Media Commission is a nine-member board appointed by the President after public interviews.

- The Media Ombudsman of Namibia is appointed through public nominations and serves a maximum of two three-year terms.

Media Ombudsman of Namibia, John Nakuta; Media Council of Tanzania executive secretary, Ernest Sungura; Moses Kaufa of the Media Council of Malawi; Kennedy Mambwe, chairperson of the Media Self-Regulation Council of Zambia, and Loughty Dube of the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe

Regulatory Status (n=11)

- Non statutory (Voluntary Self-Regulation) — 4; 37%
- Statutory — 3; 27%
- Non-statutory — 1; 9%
- Facilitation and Management — 1; 9%
- Voluntary co-regulation (Media and Public) — 1; 9%
- Co-regulatory — 1; 9%

Most organisations (7 out of 11) have one to four full-time staff members. Only one organisation has a large full-time staff (over 30). In light of these figures, the councils surveyed may have limited capacity for in-depth investigations, proactive monitoring, extensive outreach, or engaging in complex regulatory processes, causing them to focus primarily on handling complaints, providing basic guidance to the media, or operating mainly as advisory bodies. While staffing numbers are not the sole determinant of an organisation's capacity, these provide valuable insights into the potential scope and depth of work these organisations can undertake.
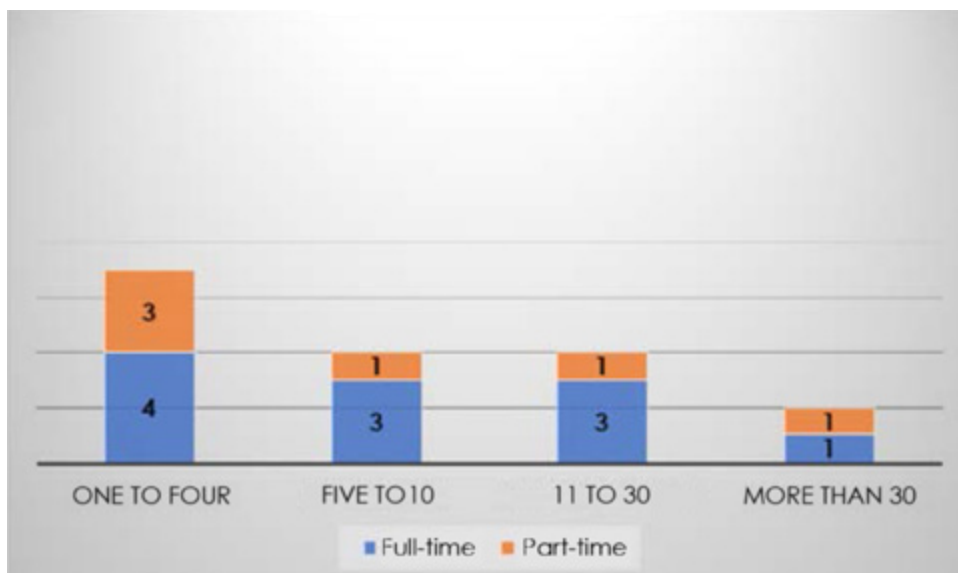

Functions and powers of the councils

Each organisation's specific functions and powers vary depending on its mandate, structure and legal framework. Further, the role of government influence varies, with some organisations operating entirely independently while others have government-appointed members or are subject to some degree of state oversight.

The core function of all the councils is promoting ethical standards and professionalism in the journalism sector. This includes activities such as setting the ethical codes, providing training and monitoring the performance of news media entities. Many organisations handle complaints and mediate disputes between the public and news media entities.

A common theme in councils' mandates is advocating for a free and independent media, along with efforts to ensure that the public accesses credible information. Councils are also responsible for providing media accountability, often through complaints mechanisms and investigations.

Regarding powers and sanctions, most organisations present at the conference operate under a voluntary self-regulation model, relying on moral persuasion and industry pressure to enforce standards. They have the power to issue formal warnings or reprimands for ethical breaches. These may result in corrections or apologies having to be published. Some organisations, like the Zimbabwe Media Commission, have statutory powers to regulate media operations and enforce compliance with the law.

Does your council get any form of state support (financial) (n=11)

36% Yes
64% No
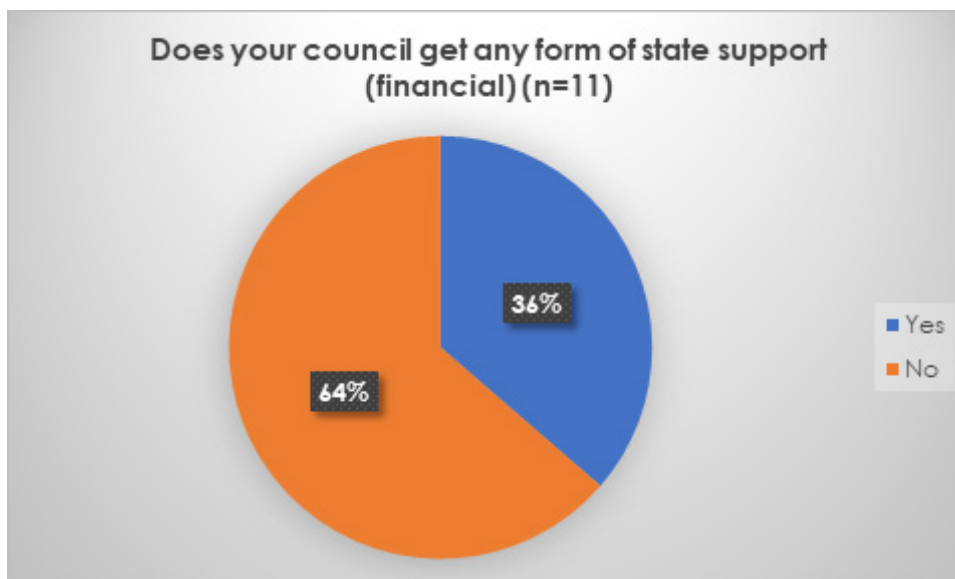
A survey on organisational compliance found an even split between those which must comply with specific regulations and those whose compliance is linked to legal foundations or through affiliations with other organisations. Regarding state intervention, five out of 11 respondents indicated their organization did not experience significant pressure. Some noted occasional pressure during elections or regarding specific regulations, but this pressure was rejected or did not significantly impact on operations.

Ernest Sungura of the Media Council of Tanzania, Latiefa Mobara of the Press Council of South Africa, Prof Ruby Magosvongwe of the Zimbabwe Media Commission, Loughty Dube of the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe, George Sarpong of the National Media Commission, Ghana, and the Media Ombudsman of Namibia, John Nakuta.

Sources of funding
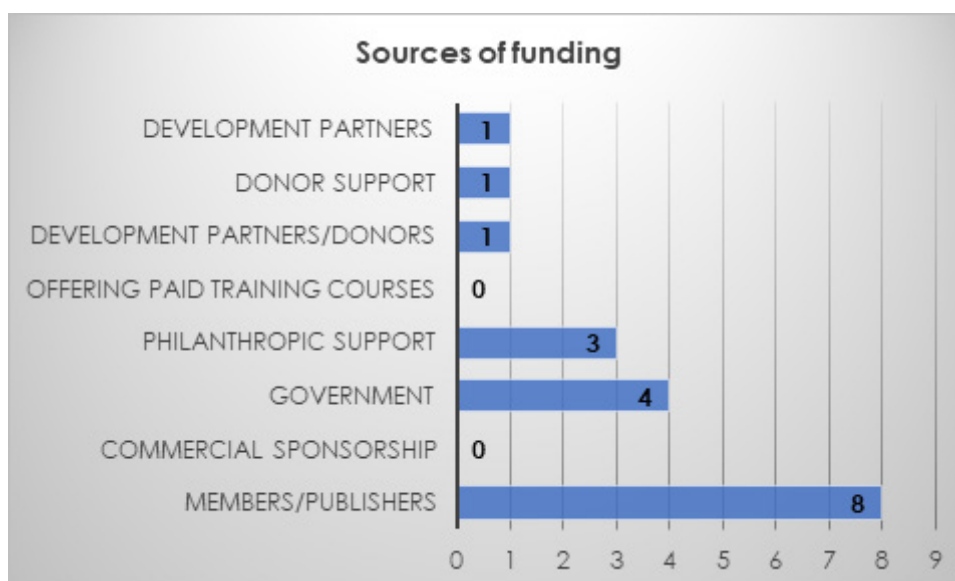
Most councils and regulators rely on members or publishers for funding, while over a third (36.4%) receive government support. Some also utilise philanthropic and donor support (27.3% and 9.1% respectively). Commercial sponsorships and paid training courses are not listed as funding sources for any. Organisations relying heavily on members/publishers may be vulnerable to membership or publishing revenue fluctuations.

Organisations indicated they use a variety of outreach and publicity strategies to promote media accountability, safeguard press freedom, and foster dialogue between the media and the public. They issue various publications, including newsletters, annual reports, and media statements to communicate with members, stakeholders, and the public.

Conferences, seminars, workshops, and training sessions are organised to promote media professionalism and ethical standards. Media councils actively engage with journalists, media owners, and broadcasters through meetings, interviews, and participation in radio and television programmes. Organizations use websites and social media to disseminate information and engage with the public. Some councils participate in public events and forums to raise awareness of their role and services. Most councils indicated offering education or training to newsrooms, members, and the public. This covers various topics, including ethical journalism, media coverage of elections and climate change, peace journalism, and sexual harassment prevention. Some councils also guide media training institutions and assess their curricula and training approaches.

Challenges

A recurring challenge for many councils and regulators is funding, with most indicating having received limited funding from government or industry sources in recent years. Linked to this is the decline of traditional media outlets and the rise of digital platforms which have created financial pressures and increased competition, making it harder to secure funding and maintain relevance. This climate has made it challenging to develop and enforce effective content regulation strategies because of the growth in user-generated content.

Some organisations mentioned a lack of legal powers, conflicting roles with government regulators and outdated laws, which create challenges and hinder the ability to enforce standards. Withstanding pressure from governments which claim to support self-regulation while simultaneously pursuing agendas that undermine media independence, is also demanding. Limited staff capacity and difficulty holding freelance journalists accountable are other key challenges.

The discussions emphasised the importance of collaboration among media councils and regulators, advocating for policy changes at African Union level, and working together to address the challenges posed by tech platforms to ensure a sustainable and independent media landscape in Africa.

Working groups on key issues for further consideration identified the following issues:

Gender

- The importance of diversity and inclusivity in media councils, which extends beyond gender to encompass sexual orientation and other aspects of identity.
- Addressing the employment numbers and lack of leadership roles for women in the media industry, as this affects their representation on media councils.
- Developing and distributing guidelines on gender-sensitive reporting and addressing issues like femicide.

Digital space

- Concerns about the power and influence of large digital platforms and the need for regulation.
- Exploring ways to regulate online content creators who don't subscribe to traditional media codes.
- Promoting media literacy to combat misinformation and disinformation.
- Developing African-owned digital platforms as credible alternatives.
- Considering a virtual badge/token system for journalists using social media who adhere to press codes.
- Addressing the impact of AI on media integrity and intellectual property rights.

Funding

- Exploring sustainable funding models that maintain the independence of media councils.
- Considering options like member funding, corporate taxation/levies, fees from network operators, and public financing.
- Ensuring transparency of funding sources and avoiding conflicts of interest.
- Monetising training programmes.

Section 2

The Newly Established Network of Independent Media Councils in Africa (NIMCA)

The AMC meeting identified the need for a solidarity network to ensure future collaboration and support among independent content regulatory bodies in Africa and resolved to set up a Network of Independent Media Councils in Africa (NIMCA) to strengthen media content regulatory bodies, promote self-regulation models and foster professional journalism standards and credible media while upholding media freedom and freedom of expression – see media statement in **Annexure 3**.

This section summarises key points from a working document outlining NIMCA's objectives and structure as agreed to by the mandated delegates, as a basis for further deliberations to formally establish the new body.

Vision: Media freedom, accountability and credible journalism as a public good.

Mission: To strengthen independent media content regulatory bodies in Africa, promote self- or co-regulation models supporting professional journalism standards and credible media, and promote freedom of expression.

Goals and objectives: To promote and protect the mutual interests of independent media regulatory bodies in Africa to benefit the media sector and the public. This includes sharing lessons and experiences, promoting member interests, engaging with international agencies for financial support, advocating for freedom of the media, addressing media fragmentation, promoting ethical journalism, combating disinformation, and exploring the role of media councils in the governance of digital platforms.

Governance structure: An annual assembly as the highest organ, with operations run by an executive board representing regional blocks and with equal gender representation.

An inaugural executive board was appointed to formally establish the body and host the first NIMCA conference in 2025 in Tanzania, chaired by the Media Council of Tanzania's executive secretary Ernest Sungura, together with the host of the AMC meeting, Latiefa Mobara, executive director of the Press Council of South Africa, George Sarpong, executive secretary/CEO of the National Media Commission in Ghana; and Kennedy Mambwe, chairperson of the Media Self-Regulatory Council of Zambia.

Initial key deliverables include:

- The inaugural executive board taking all steps necessary to formally set up the organisations and present a constitution and operational plan to the 2025 conference for adoption.

- Setting up a support group to work with the secretariat of the Media Council of Tanzania and/or the Secretariat of the East African Press Council to prepare for the 2025 conference, to be attended by existing and new members.

- Securing financial support from various sources, including KAS, UNESCO and other development partners.

Section 3

Media and Platform Content Regulation in the Digital Age

During the AMC conference two sessions dealt with the **_UNESCO Guidelines on the Governance of Digital Platforms_** – firstly to familiarise regulators with the principles for a multistakeholder approach to digital platform governance, and secondly to identify possible touch points between the work of the African media councils and the Guidelines.

The sessions focused on

- how self-regulation fits into the wider drive for platform regulation and related UNESCO guidelines

- possibilities to expand media council mandates into the wider platform economy and the idea of some level of involvement with platform regulation

- practices and lessons learnt from media self-regulation across African countries for application to digital platforms' governance

- possible collaboration between media councils in Africa and national coalitions for content moderation created under UNESCO's "Social Media 4 Peace" project for effective social media self-regulation mechanisms

The **"Social Media 4 Peace" project**, initiated in 2021 and concluded in 2023, focused on mitigating the harmful effects of social media, particularly hate speech and violent content, while upholding freedom of expression and fostering peacebuilding.

Members of the Kenyan multi-stakeholder coalition who were involved in the project briefed the conference on the objectives and outcomes.

The project encompassed three key aspects:

1. **Research and assessment:** In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Indonesia and Kenya, the project investigated the legal instruments and tools available to each country for addressing harmful content. It also delved into the root causes of hate speech and evaluated the effectiveness of existing legislation and other measures.

2. **Solutions Implementation:** The project developed and implemented new tools and strategies to curb harmful content based on the research findings. These included enhancing the capacity of various stakeholders, piloting appeals councils for user complaints, and promoting content moderation best practice.

3. **Capacity building:** The project prioritised capacity building by training civil society organisations (CSOs) on leveraging social media for peacebuilding narratives and educating youth on media literacy to build resilience against harmful content. Additionally, media professionals received training on conflict-sensitive reporting.

A key success factor of the project was its multi-stakeholder approach, involving government, civil society, media organisations and social media platforms. The project aimed to create a more peaceful and inclusive digital environment by prioritising human rights and collaborating across sectors.

The project's findings and lessons learned were compiled in the _Social Media 4 Peace - Global Report, Local Lessons for Global Practices,_ contributing to ongoing international discussions on countering harmful content and promoting peace online. The full report can be viewed here.

Section 4

Fostering Peace and Ethics in Media – Lessons from Zimbabwe

In partnership with UNESCO, Zimbabwe's Media Commission (ZMC) implemented a multi-faceted initiative to elevate media standards and promote peaceful elections and presented the outcome of this project to the AMC meeting.

The project included the development of a practical *Elections Reporting and Peace Journalism Manual* aimed at reinforcing an existing code of conduct for journalists, promoting peace journalism principles, and mitigating the spread of disinformation and misinformation. There was also comprehensive training for 800 journalists and organising of media indabas (conferences) for collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including media professionals, security forces, political parties, religious leaders, gender commissions, human rights commissions, and the electoral commission. These gatherings fostered dialogue and collaboration, culminating in the development of a pledge to uphold ethical reporting standards and ensure a peaceful electoral environment.

UNESCO and ZMC led the initial drafting of the pledge, which was then disseminated to media stakeholders for further engagement and adoption. To enhance the safety of journalists, press jackets were provided to accredited media professionals, building on lessons learned from previous elections. The manual itself was designed to be a pocket-sized booklet, making it a readily available reference for journalists in the field. In addition, a media monitoring project was implemented to assess journalists' adherence to the elections manual. Thirty-two platforms were monitored weekly, providing valuable insights into reporting practices and identifying areas for improvement.

The booklet and the associated initiatives represent a significant effort by Zimbabwe to strengthen media professionalism, promote peaceful elections, and combat disinformation. By fostering collaboration, providing training, and emphasising ethical reporting, this project serves as a model for other countries seeking to enhance the role of media in democratic processes.

The project faced challenges due to a late start, leading to some rushed aspects. Further, gender-sensitive reporting during the election was identified as an area needing improvement, and recommendations included the domestication of the United Nations plan on the safety of journalists. Notably, however, it was deemed a success because there were no reports of violence against journalists for the first time in Zimbabwean elections, and all stakeholders came together to support journalists during the polls.

Tshamano Makhadi of the PCSA, Lwandle Simelane of the Eswatini National Commission for UNESCO, Siphiwe Tame of MENAR, Nwabisa Makunga of the PCSA and Themba Sepotokele of the PCSA

Conclusion

The African Media Councils series of meetings hosted by the Press Council of South Africa demonstrated the critical need for robust media self-regulation across Africa. As outlined in this report, key discussions revealed diverse governance structures and the need for collaborative approaches to overcome funding and regulatory challenges.

Establishing the Network of Independent Media Councils in Africa (NIMCA) is an important step towards promoting media freedom, ethical journalism, and combating disinformation.

The UNESCO-led initiatives highlighted the importance of multi-stakeholder approaches in regulating social media and fostering peace. Zimbabwe's efforts to promote ethical journalism during elections provide a valuable model for other African nations.

To further these strides, it is recommended that media councils and regulators enhance their collaboration, share best practice, and advocate for supportive policies at African Union level. Other key recommendations include addressing the challenges posed by digital platforms, including regulating online content and promoting media literacy. Further, sustainable funding models that do not compromise media independence should be explored, including member funding, corporate levies, and donor support.

Izak Minnaar of the PCSA in conversation with Loughty Dube of the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe and Prof Ruby Magosvongwe of the Zimbabwe Media Commission

Dr Sisanda Nkoala of the PCSA, who is also the author of this report, and Stephanie Luyt of conference logistics

Dr Taryn de Vega of Rhodes University and Rosemary Mwangi of the Communications Authority of Kenya

Fanwell Chembo of the Media Self-Regulation Council of Zambia and Kemantha Govender of the PCSA

Tshamano Makhadi and Themba Sepotokele of the PCSA

ANNEXURE 1: Delegates and participants

Conference participants came from 13 countries in Africa: Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Most media council delegates attended in person, although Nigeria's delegate fell ill and together with Ethiopia's delegate (due to a visa delay) attended some sessions virtually.

Mandated representatives from media councils:

Ethiopia	**Tamerat Hailu**	Ethiopian Media Council
Ghana	**George Sarpong**	National Media Commission, Ghana
Kenya	**Dr David Omwoyo**	Media Council of Kenya
	Victor Bwire	Media Council of Kenya
Malawi	**Moses Kaufa**	Media Council of Malawi
Namibia	**John Nakuta**	Media Ombudsman Namibia
Nigeria	**Dr Dili Ezughah**	Nigerian Press Council
Rwanda	**Emmanuel Mugisha**	Rwanda Media Commission
South Africa	**Latiefa Mobara**	Press Council of SA Executive Director
	Herman Scholtz	Press Council of SA Ombudsman
	Izak Minnaar	Press Council of SA
Tanzania	**Ernest Sungura**	Media Council of Tanzania
Uganda	**Peter Okello**	Media Council of Uganda
Zambia	**Kennedy K Mambwe**	Media Self Regulation Council of Zambia
	Fanwell Chembo	Media Self Regulation Council of Zambia
	Samson Mujuda	Media Self Regulation Council of Zambia
Zimbabwe	**Loughty Dube**	Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe
	Prof Ruby Magosvongwe	Zimbabwe Media Commission

Samson Mujuda, Fanwell Chembo and Kennedy Mambwe of the Media Self-Regulation Council of Zambia (far left, and second and third from left), Moses Kaufa of the Media Council of Malawi and Emmanuel Mugisha of the Rwanda Media Commission

Representatives from content partners and sponsors:

Nisha	Unesco regional director, ROSA
Al-Amin Yusuph	Unesco CI regional advisor Southern Africa
Misako Ito	Unesco CI regional advisor Nairobi
John Okande	Unesco (Nairobi) programme officer
Mikel Aguirre Idiaquez	Unesco Project Officer Communication and Information
Rosemary Mwangi	Communication Authority of Kenya
Victor Kapiyo	Kenya ICT Action Network
Hendrik Sittig	Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung
Rebecca Sibanda	Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung
Mpumelelo Mkhabela	MENAR

Experts and guests from South Africa and Eswatini:

Prof Guy Berger	ICT Africa
Dr Taryn de Vega	Rhodes University
William Bird	Media Monitoring Africa
Nwabisa Makunga	South African National Editors' Forum
Fanie Groenewald	Press Council of SA Public Advocate
Janet Smith	Press Council of SA
Themba Sepotokele	Press Council of SA
Sisanda Nkoala	Press Council of SA
Pippa Green	Press Council of SA
Kemantha Govender	Press Council of SA
Amina Frense	Press Council of SA
Reg Rumney	Press Council of SA
John Matisonn	Press Council of SA
Tshamano Makhadi	Press Council of SA
Mahmood Sanglay	Press Council of SA
Faizel Dawjee	Press Council of SA
Lwandle Simelane	Eswatini National Commission for Unesco
Mbongeni Mbingo	Eswatini Editors' Forum

ANNEXURE 2: AMC conference programme

Wednesday 15 May: African Media Councils meeting

08:30	**REGISTRATION**	
09:00	Welcome	Latiefa Mobara, PCSA
09:05	UN Resident Coordinator in South Africa	Nelson Muffuh (online)
09:10	Director UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa (ROSA)	Nisha
09:15	South African National Commission for UNESCO	Haroon Mahomed
09:20	Overview, introductions	Prof. Guy Berger – meeting facilitator
10:00	Africa's media councils: models, codes, funding, challenges	Facilitator: as above
11:00	**BREAK**	
11:30	Africa's media councils (continued)	
13:00	**WORKING LUNCH AND GROUP WORK** Topics: independence and financing challenges, gender representation and digital space regulation.	Facilitator: Izak Minnaar
15:30	**BREAK**	

16:00	Presentation on UNESCO's *Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms* and the principles of multi-stakeholder and rights-based governance Panel discussion: "Social Media 4 Peace": piloting the principles and approaches of the guidelines in Kenya – what we have learnt	Mikel Aguirre Idiaquez Panel: Victor Bwire, Director for Strategy and Training Media Council of Kenya Rosemary Mwangi, Principal Officer Broadcast and Content Regulation Communication Authority of Kenya Victor Kapiyo, Advocate of High Court, Tech and Digital Rights Specialist Kenya ICT Network Moderator: John Otieno Okande
17:00	Issues to pursue and prep work to develop proposals for future collaboration	Prof Guy Berger Izak Minnaar Al-Amin Yusuph Regional representatives
17:30	Case study: Fostering peace and ethics in media: Harnessing the Zimbabwe *Elections Reporting and Peace Journalism Manual* for the 2023 Elections Presentation and Q&A	Prof. Ruby Magosvongwe, Chairperson, Zimbabwe Media Commission Al-Amin Yusuph, UNESCO Regional Adviser for Communication and Information
18:00	**CLOSING**	

On the 16th and the morning of 17 May, delegates attended open sessions of the conference of the global Organization of News Ombudsmen and Standards Editors (ONO), co-hosted by the South African Press Council and Media24; as well as a meeting where the establishment of a Network of Independent Media Councils in Africa was agreed to.

Friday 17 May 14:00 to 17:00 - UNESCO workshop for AMC delegates

14:00	**Introduction to the UNESCO** _**Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms**_ Presentation and Q&A: Mikel Aguirre Idiaquez
14:30	**What is next in the implementation of the _Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms?_** Participants will be working in groups and with the support of UNESCO will brainstorm on how the guidelines can be implemented in their respective countries. ● Identifying regulatory arrangements in each country (formal/legal/and informal) ● Identifying key disinformation/hate speech issues/challenges) ● Mapping key stakeholders to engage in the governance of digital platforms in each country
16:15	**Principles and Guidelines for the Use of Digital and Social Media in Elections in Africa** Prof Guy Berger
17:00	**CLOSING**

African media councils form a pan-African network for self-regulatory bodies

In an African first, the Network of Independent Media Councils in Africa (NIMCA) was formed on 16 May 2024 after the inaugural meeting of African media councils convened by the Press Council of South Africa.

The 13 councils from East, West and Southern Africa resolved to establish the new body to bring together independent media content regulators from around the continent and to convene regularly to discuss the strengthening of media freedom, ethics and public accountability on the continent.

NIMCA calls on independent media regulators in other African countries to join the new organisation to promote self-regulation as the cornerstone of a free, professional and credible media in an evolving communications landscape where social media is implicated in the circulation of unethical and low-quality content.

NIMCA's objective is for the professional media to report freely and without fear of reprisals while at the same time being accountable for living up to journalistic ethical standards and codes of practice.

NIMCA's ethos and operations will be guided by the *Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa,* issued by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in 2019.

The Cape Town meeting agreed that the media, irrespective of whether it is privately or government funded, needs to operate in a free environment with no threats of censorship, intimidation, harassment or threats against journalists. This is because independent and professional journalism is a critical pillar of society that holds governments and other powerful actors accountable, informs the citizenry and help them understand their societies and events as they unfold.

The African media councils met during Africa Month and shortly after World Press Freedom Day and deliberated on a range of issues, from the governance of digital platforms and companies, through to developing a pan-African media ethics framework and ethos, along with UNESCO's principles for a communications regulatory system that works to foster ethical and credible journalism.

The regulators emphasised that in jurisdictions where co-regulation is constitutionally stipulated, media councils and similar bodies must be allowed to self-regulate and act independently from government. They agreed that trust in and credibility of the media is vital for its survival, and that self-regulatory mechanisms are key to uphold professional standards and consider complaints where media fall short of meeting these.

Delegates also highlighted the issue of gender equity and sensitivity in the composition of regulatory bodies. The NIMCA executive body will in future be formed with equal representation of men and women.

Delegates from the media councils shared their best practices and challenges about press freedom, as well as how to foster ethical journalism in an environment where the media and its regulatory bodies face a crisis of funding and sustainability.

In a fast-changing digital environment, the media regulatory bodies noted that they need to provide guidance on how media should deal with ethical issues related to the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI), convergence, and the need for new journalism curricula and training models.

Delegates highlighted the risks of social media being treated as a news source by the public, although this environment lacks effective quality standards and ethics, and where trustworthy content and journalism are increasingly hard to find.

The media councils recognised the importance of exploring new financial support models for the media, in order to promote, support and sustain journalism and the related independent self-regulation mechanisms in the industry.

The councils urged journalists, photographers and other media practitioners to uphold the basic tenets of journalism in order to fend off state regulation and punitive measures by those in positions of power.

They also commented on developments in Zambia and welcomed the commitment by the Zambian government to encourage media self-regulation as opposed to state regulation. They urged other countries to repeal repressive laws and policies gagging the media and ensure and promote media freedom.

In the case of Eswatini, where the government has warned that it may consider statutory regulation, delegates urged stakeholders to vigorously pursue a path towards self-regulation.

Delegates from UNESCO also participated in the meeting and reaffirmed the organisation's commitment to support and collaborate with African media councils in advocating for freedom of expression, universal access to verified information and safety of journalists and media professionals in line with regional and internationally agreed goals and frameworks.

NIMCA will initially be led by the Media Council of Tanzania (MCT), which also chairs the East Africa Press Council, represented by MCT executive secretary Ernest Sungura; together with the host of the inaugural meeting, Latiefa Mobara, executive director of the Press Council of South Africa; George Sarpong, executive secretary/CEO of the National Media Commission in Ghana; and Kennedy Mambwe, chairperson of the Media Self-Regulatory Council of Zambia. They will form the inaugural executive board of NIMCA to set up the organisation.

The MCT will host the 2025 NIMCA meeting, with support from UNESCO and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, and will also act as the initial secretariat for NIMCA.

Sungura, the first NIMCA chair, said, "This is an important day for our media sector and eco-system. For too long our media councils have operated in silos with little engagement or information sharing. In a world that is increasingly connected, but also fracturing into echo

The inaugural NIMCA chair and Media Council of Tanzania executive secretary, Ernest Sungura, and Latiefa Mobara of the Press Council of South Africa

chambers, NIMCA heralds a new era for building common approaches, deepening media freedom, foster stronger accountability systems and support credible, sustainable journalism across our continent."

Participants from the following independent media regulatory bodies, some statutory and others non-statutory, participated in the inaugural meeting:

East Africa

Media Council of Tanzania

Media Council of Kenya

Media Council of Uganda

Rwanda Media Commission

Ethiopia Media Council

West Africa

National Media Commission, Ghana

Nigerian Press Council

Southern Africa

Media Ombudsman of Namibia

Media Council of Malawi

Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe Media Commission

Media Self-Regulation Council of

Zambia

Press Council of South Africa

Prof Ruby Magosvongwe of the Zimbabwe Media Commission

Note to editors:

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