

# Let's commemorate Press Freedom Day with the rest of the world!

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This year's World Press Freedom Day, Sunday 3rd May 2009, marks the 18th anniversary of the 1991 Declaration of Windhoek, a statement of principles calling for a free, independent and pluralistic media throughout the world, adopted at a UNESCO seminar. The Declaration affirms that a free press is essential to the existence of democracy and a fundamental human goal.

***"Our Constitution enshrines freedom of expression and the independence of the media. Working together we must promote access to information. We will continue to protect, defend and promote media freedom as we have always done. However, we reiterate that the media, like all other institutions, must be transformed. Like all institutions in our country, it must strive to reflect South African society in terms of ownership, staffing, gender and content. Together as a nation, we must work to build a media that is free, diverse, critical and independent a media that can inform, entertain and empower all our people," said the South Africa's President-elect and ANC President Jacob Zuma addressing more than 500 000 SA connected to 10 different stadiums, 19/04/09.***

The Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA), which is tasked with building an environment where a diverse, vibrant and creative media flourishes and reflects the needs of all South Africans, invites all South Africans to remember and celebrate World Press Freedom Day.

"According to the 2007 Index of Reporters Without Borders, South Africa has a reason to celebrate when it comes to Freedom of the Press, as it is ranked 36 along with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cape Verde, Spain, Republic of China (Taiwan) and the United States. This is a far cry from the dark days of Apartheid, especially the 19th October 1977 when the Apartheid regime banned 17 organisations and two newspapers, 'The World' and the 'Weekend World'," said Mr Lumko Mtimde, the Chief Executive Officer of the MDDA.

South Africa has a dynamic media industry, both broadcast and print media. The Apartheid government censorship (pre-1994 democratic elections) severely hampered the media industry; ensuring that it "towed the line" in terms of the apartheid government's policies. Post 1994 saw the enactment of a new constitution (Constitution Act No 108 of 1996) with a Bill of Rights guaranteeing that every citizen has the right to freedom of expression, freedom of the press and other media.

The MDDA encourage ownership and control of, and access to, media by historically disadvantaged communities as well as by historically diminished indigenous language and cultural groups; and support initiatives which promote literacy and the culture of reading. The MDDA's goal of ensuring that 'each and every South African citizen has access to a choice of a diverse range of media' is hampered by issues of ownership and control of media. Especially when it comes to print media, which after fifteen years of democracy, still rests in the hands of a few large companies who own and control a large number of national newspapers, local newspapers and magazines across the country.

"This has prompted the Agency to commission a company to conduct a research study into Trends of the existing Ownership and Control of media in South Africa, with particular focus on categorizing trends by province and where possible by district municipality. As a continuation to the commemoration of Press Freedom, the Agency will soon unveil the research report on trends of ownership and control of media in South Africa. It takes stock of the number of print and broadcast media in the country from District Municipality level," said Mr Mtimde.

In its five years in existence, the Agency has funded more than 239 community and small commercial media projects (both broadcast and print), with approximately more than R77m in grants. As we all celebrate World Freedom Day, the Agency firmly believes that the freedom of the press and diversity of the media is a pre-requisite for a flourishing democracy. The

Agency will continue to provide support to the development of more voices in the media through funding, capacity building programmes, which enable and empower people to take control of their personal lives. This will of course enable them to shape their future as they see fit and completely transform their communities.

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