



2008 AGM RESOLUTIONS: Protea Waterfront Hotel, Centurion, Pretoria 30 August-1 September 2008

Preamble

Noting that media and freedom of expression and access to information rights are fundamental for the advancement of our societies and region in all aspects of life.

Recalling that these rights are expressed in many documents and declarations signed by our governments including Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The Windhoek Declaration of 1991, The Africa Charter on Broadcasting, African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, SADC Protocol on Information, Sports and Culture and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,

Concerned about the continued threats to media freedom in Southern Africa.

Acknowledging efforts being made by some governments, SADC Secretariat and Africa Union to improve and protect media, freedom of expression and access to Information rights,

Reaffirming our desire to continue working for the full realisation of the rights expressed in the documents cited above,

We the delegates to the MISA 2008 Annual General Meeting held in Centurion, Pretoria, South Africa on 30 August-1 September 2008, do hereby declare and resolve as follows,

1. We reaffirm our belief that self regulation in the media remains the best form of regulation as it protects both the interests of the citizens while protecting media rights.
2. We are concerned about the existence of statutory media regulation in Zimbabwe and threats to impose such systems in Botswana, Swaziland, Zambia, South Africa and Tanzania against the interests of the media. We therefore mandate the MISA regional secretariat to continue working

with MISA national chapters in strengthening self regulatory structures and creating such structures where they are non existent in all countries that MISA works in.

3. We express our deep concern over the continued deterioration of the situation in Zimbabwe especially the continued harassment, beatings and arrests of journalists and ordinary Zimbabweans. We further raise our concern that the political dialogue in Zimbabwe is being held in secrecy and civic society views have not been taken into account. We mandate the MISA Regional Office and MISA-Zimbabwe to work closely in developing alternative policies and advocacy strategies especially taking note of the shift in the balance of power in the Zimbabwe Parliament.

4. We express concern over the regression of the observance and respect for media and freedom of expression rights in South Africa, Tanzania and Botswana. These three countries, once seen as the beacons of democracy in the region, are in the process of enacting repressive media and freedom of expression laws that negatively impact on the free operations of the media. We therefore call upon the governments of the three countries to drop the proposed media laws and consult the media on any future media policies. We hold that the Proposed Protection of Information law in South Africa impinges on media rights. The Tanzanian Media Services Bill carries provisions that we are opposed to, especially the mandatory registration of journalists and media organisations. We also note that the proposed Media Practitioners Bill in Botswana is a serious attempt at stifling free media work.

5. This meeting mandates MISA to work closely with MISA-Angola to address the bad media and freedom of expression situation in Angola. Media rights are routinely impinged upon in Angola and this situation is likely to get worse as the country conducts a general election in 2008.

6. We call upon the government of Lesotho to recede its suspension of the broadcasting licence of Harvest FM. This suspension, on the basis of allegations made by powerful individuals, is best dealt with through civil courts and not the Broadcasting regulator. MISA condemns the abuse of regulatory powers to protect the powerful in society. We therefore mandate MISA and MISA Lesotho to start consultations and work with broadcasters on developing independent broadcasting mediation councils along the lines of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa. This we believe will address genuine concerns around unethical media reporting while protecting the rights of the broadcasting stations.

7. South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, Angola and Mozambique will be conducting elections in 2008 and 2009. We therefore call upon governments in these countries to uphold the SADC Electoral Guidelines as a whole, but in particular a fair access to public media coverage. We, therefore, call upon the MISA regional Office to work with national offices in the above mentioned countries to develop programmes that ensure the protection of journalists, and monitor the operations of the media in the election period, especially taking note of issues of bias and the exclusion of minority voices such as women, civic society and the youths.

8. We follow with interest the constitutional processes in Swaziland and Zambia and the opportunities presented to engage the government on further reforms. We therefore mandate MISA, MISA-Swaziland and MISA-Zambia to work closely and monitor the implementation of the new constitutional processes to ensure that media and freedom of expression and association rights are incorporated and implemented in the Bill of Rights.

9. We express our general concern over the abuse of the state media in the region, especially state broadcasters by governments and ruling elites. We further express concern over the lack of a right to information legislation in the region. We are concerned and disappointed about the stagnation of legislative processes in Malawi, Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland and Zambia.

10. We therefore mandate MISA to double its efforts to achieve the transformation of the state broadcasters into true public service broadcasters as well as seek the finalisation of positive legislative processes in countries mentioned above.

11. We are aware of the perilous state of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). We believe that divergent political interest groups are tearing the SABC apart for the advancement of their partisan interest. We therefore call upon the ruling ANC and government to facilitate open dialogue with civic society and other interest groups with a view of reviewing legislation governing the SABC and protect and entrench the independence of the SABC as a public service broadcaster.

12. We further express concern at the financial penalties that the Malawi Parliament is imposing on the state broadcaster. In view of the coming 2009 general election, we believe that these financial penalties will seriously compromise the operations of Malawi Broadcasting Corporation and TV Malawi as well as compromise the impartiality of the state broadcasters. We call upon Parliament to reverse its decision and enact legislation guaranteeing the independence of the state broadcaster as well as other related broadcasting laws that ensure independent regulation of the broadcast media in Malawi. This we believe is the only and sustainable way of ensuring equitable coverage by the state broadcaster, an issue which is at the core of the continued financial sanctions against the state broadcaster by the opposition dominated parliament.

13. MISA resolves to engage in all other issues of regional importance including the role of a democratic media in mitigating the ensuing food crisis and ensuring that the SADC Free Trade agreement promotes access to information, development of the media convergence through the ICTs and as a result thereof increased integration, democracy, solidarity and access to information for the people of Southern Africa.

Thus done on 1 September 2008 in Centurion, Pretoria, South Africa.