

THE MARRAKECH DECLARATION

(Adopted in Marrakech on November 24, 2004)

We, the participants in the conference on the follow-up of the World Information Society Summit (WSIS) on *"The Role and Place of the Media in the Information Society in Africa and the Arab Region"*, organized in Marrakech (Morocco), from 22 to 24 November, 2004, by the Kingdom of Morocco (the Ministry of Communication and the Ministry Delegate to the Prime Minister in charge of Economic and General Affairs) and ORBICOM, the International Network of UNESCO Chairs in Communications

Consider that Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is an essential foundation of the Information Society: *"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media, and regardless of frontiers"*.

Reaffirm the principles contained in the Declarations of Windhoek (1991) and of Sana'a (1996) on Promoting Independent and Pluralistic Media in Africa and the Arab States, as well as those related to media in the Declaration of Principles adopted by the Geneva WSIS, on December 2003.

Declare that

The time has come to move from the promise of Article 19 to its universal implementation.

Freedom of expression and press freedom are at the core of construction of the Information Society in Africa, the Arab region, and throughout the world.

Everyone, everywhere should have the opportunity to participate in the Information Society and to take advantage of its benefits. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) as well as media must be a fulcrum for equitable access to sustainable development.

The Internet and other new media forms should be afforded the same freedom of expression protections as traditional media.

The international debate on *"Internet Governance"* should allow better cooperation on Internet management. It should not be a pretext to regulate Internet content of news or opinion. In particular, security considerations and the demands of the battle against crime including terrorism should not imperil freedom of expression and press freedom. Internet Service Providers should not be held liable for the content of the messages they carry.

Representatives of the media must be involved as full partners in any future Internet governance system.

Domestic legislation must guarantee the independence and pluralism of the media.

The media's function in producing, gathering, checking and distributing diverse news and content, including at the local community level, is vital. Legal and regulatory frameworks are needed to encourage community media. To that end, those dispositions should be non-discriminatory and provide for equitable allocation of frequencies through transparent mechanisms.

State-controlled broadcasting outlets must be transformed into public service entities with statutes of editorial independence and where journalists have autonomous professional status.

The Information Society should enable women's empowerment and their full and equal access to and use of media and information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Cultural diversity should not only be preserved. It must be fostered. Particular attention must be given to the situation of indigenous people for the safeguard of their linguistic and cultural heritages.

Public and private organizations, such as bilateral and multilateral aid agencies as well as foundations, should stress freedom of expression and press freedom when they fund programmes and projects to overcome the digital divide.

All journalists must enjoy the core labor rights, including of freedom of association, as set forth in the conventions of the International Labor Organization. In this regard, a particular attention should be given to media professionals' training.

A professional approach to journalistic practices is the most effective way to promote press freedom and ethics, so as to safeguard against government restrictions and pressures by interest groups. The creation of ethical norms is the sole responsibility of media professionals themselves.

Disputes involving the media and/or the media professionals in the exercise of their duties should be settled by an independent judicial system. Such disputes, including those involving defamation, should be tried by civil courts not penal or military ones.