COMMUNIQUÉ

African Media Councils Conference 2026
17–18 March 2026
Lusaka, Republic of Zambia

The Lusaka Declaration on Media Self-Regulation, Accountability, Sustainability and Information Integrity in Africa

Preamble

We, representatives of African media councils, self-regulatory bodies, media practitioners, civil society organisations, academia, and international partners, convened in Lusaka, Zambia, from 17 to 18 March 2026 at the African Media Councils Conference hosted by the Media Self-Regulation Council of Zambia (MSCZ),

GUIDED by the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, and the ongoing work of the Commission to develop normative standards for the realisation of the rights to freedom of expression and access to information in Africa,

RECALLING the Windhoek Declaration and Windhoek+30, and building on the outcomes of the Network of Independent Media Councils (NIMCA) Summit held in Arusha in 2025,

TAKING NOTE of the M20 Johannesburg Declaration, UNESCO's Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms, and ongoing work on access to data, platform accountability, and information integrity,

RECOGNISING that the media environment has evolved from institution-based systems to a complex, networked information ecosystem shaped by digital platforms, artificial intelligence, and cross-border information flows,

CONCERNED by increasing threats to media freedom, including political pressure, economic constraints, disinformation, and attacks on journalists,

REAFFIRMING that independent media self-regulation remains the most effective and democratic model for ensuring accountability while safeguarding editorial independence,

Key Principles

We affirm the following:

1. **Media self-regulation is the primary and preferred model of media accountability in democratic societies.**
   It provides a credible, independent, and proportionate mechanism to uphold ethical journalism without compromising freedom of expression.

2. **Media councils are central institutions within democratic information ecosystems.**
   Their role extends beyond complaints adjudication to include standard-setting, public engagement, policy interface, and safeguarding information integrity in a media environment no longer defined solely by traditional journalistic institutions, but by a distributed ecosystem of actors, technologies, and platforms that shape public discourse.

3. **The independence, sustainability, and legitimacy of media councils require deliberate protection.**
   This includes legal recognition without interference, diversified funding, and institutional strengthening.

4. **Information integrity is a shared responsibility.**
   Media councils, platforms, states, and civil society must act within a human rights framework to address disinformation, platform harms, and emerging technological risks.

5. **African-led approaches are essential.**
   Regulatory responses to digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and platform governance must be grounded in African realities, values, and priorities.

Recognitions

We recognise that:

- Media councils operate in increasingly constrained environments marked by financial instability and political pressure
- Digital platforms are reshaping news production, distribution, and accountability systems
- Artificial intelligence presents both opportunities for innovation and risks to editorial integrity and public trust
- Women journalists and marginalised groups face heightened exposure to online harm
- Public awareness of media accountability mechanisms remains limited
- Regional coordination remains insufficient despite shared challenges

Strategic Commitments

We commit to the following:

1. Strengthening Media Self-Regulation and Institutional Safeguards
- Promote self-regulation as the standard for media accountability across Africa
- Advocate for enabling legal and policy environments that protect independence
- Strengthen governance systems, codes of conduct, and accountability mechanisms
- Expand the mandate of media councils to address emerging information ecosystem challenges

2. Advancing Information Integrity and Platform Accountability
- Position media councils as key actors in national and continental information integrity systems
- Engage in ongoing African and global processes on platform governance, platform performance, and access to data
- Promote transparency, accountability, and human rights in digital platform operations
- Support the development of standards on public service content and access to credible information

3. Responding to Artificial Intelligence and Digital Transformation
- Develop African guidelines on artificial intelligence and journalism ethics
- Promote transparency in AI-assisted content production
- Strengthen newsroom capacity to manage technological change responsibly
- Advance research and policy engagement on the impact of AI on media systems

4. Strengthening Sustainability and Independence
- Develop diversified, sustainable funding models for media councils
- Strengthen engagement with development partners and regional institutions
- Promote pooled funding and collaborative resource mobilisation mechanisms
- Reinforce financial independence as a prerequisite for regulatory credibility

5. Building a Pan-African and Regional Architecture for Media Councils
- Strengthen continental coordination through NIMCA
- Support the establishment of the **Southern Africa Press Councils (SAPC)** as a regional platform to promote self-regulation, as well as collaboration, knowledge exchange, and joint advocacy
- Promote harmonisation of ethical standards and complaints mechanisms across jurisdictions
- Facilitate peer learning, joint research, and coordinated responses to cross-border issues

6. Enhancing Public Engagement and Accessibility
- Improve accessibility, efficiency, and responsiveness of complaints systems
- Increase public awareness of media councils and their role
- Strengthen transparency through publication of rulings and case summaries
- Promote media literacy and public understanding of ethical journalism

7. Promoting Inclusion and Equity
- Advance gender equality in media governance and regulatory bodies
- Address online violence against women journalists
- Promote inclusive media content and representation
- Encourage participation of youth and underrepresented groups in media governance

Implementation and Way Forward

To operationalise these commitments, we will:
- Establish mechanisms to monitor implementation of this declaration
- Develop regional and continental frameworks on AI, ethics, and accountability
- Strengthen collaboration with the African Union, SADC, ECOWAS, and other regional bodies
- Engage governments while maintaining institutional independence
- Expand membership and strengthen participation across regions
- Build structured partnerships with academia, civil society, and development partners

Appreciation

We express our appreciation to:
- The Government of the Republic of Zambia
- The Media Self-Regulation Council of Zambia
- The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Zambia
- BBC Media Action, FCDO, SIDA, the European Union, and other cooperating partners
- All participants for their contributions and commitment

Conclusion

We affirm that **solidarity is both a guiding principle and a strategic practice** that shapes collective action.

A strong, independent, and collaborative African media ecosystem is essential to uphold freedom of expression, strengthen democracy, and ensure access to credible information.

We leave Lusaka with a shared commitment to advance media self-regulation, reinforce accountability, and shape a resilient and rights-based information environment for Africa.

Adopted in Lusaka, Republic of Zambia, on 18 March 2026

For and on behalf of participating institutions:
1. The Media Self-Regulation Council of Zambia
2. Network of Independent Media Councils in Africa
3. Media Council of Kenya
4. Media Council of Tanzania
5. Ethiopian Media Council
6. National Media Commission of Ghana
7. Media Council of Malawi
8. Press Council of South Africa
9. Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe
10. Media Association of Zimbabwe
11. Media Council of Uganda
12. Editor's Forum of Eswatini
13. Editor's Forum of Botswana
14. NMT Media Foundation - Namibia
15. Media Institute of Southern Africa, Botswana Chapter
16. The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Zambia