



## **STATEMENT**

**BY**

**SADC EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
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**ON THE OCCASION OF AN INTRODUCTORY  
CONSULTATIVE MEETING WITH THE EDITORS IN CHIEF  
OF GABORONE BASED MEDIA HOUSES**

**GABORONE, REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA  
MAY 13<sup>TH</sup>, 2014**

**Distinguished leaders of the Media in Gaborone,  
SADC Secretariat Management Team,**

It is my delightful honour and pleasure to welcome you all to this important consultative meeting which aims at enabling the SADC citizens in general and Botswana in particular, to have access to information on and about SADC activities, policies, programmes, and projects. I highly appreciate your presence here today and look forward to a fruitful engagement. In the same vein, I wish to thank you for your commitment, over the years, in your attendance of, and participation in SADC activities – particularly those that have a bearing on the promotion of the SADC Brand.

Since my appointment in September last year, engaging Media Executives in the region formed a key priority in my familiarization and consultation schedule with SADC stakeholders, institutions and key role players in the SADC regional integration agenda. In addition to introducing myself as the new Executive Secretary of SADC, my primary objective of seeking to engage Media Executives is for us to cultivate, strengthen and broaden cooperation between SADC and the media industry in the region.

Within the context of the SADC Regional Integration agenda, the media is regarded as the greatest custodians of SADC information and enlightenment – a crucial tool that must be employed in shaping the process towards regional integration and development. You are entrusted with the instruments that are necessary to build media capacity to enable the people of our region to understand issues of regional integration and create awareness and visibility of SADC in the regional integration.

## **Distinguished Media Executives,**

The formation of SADC and the unity of the people of the SADC Region was a dream of a SADC leaders. That dream became the hope of many of our peoples. Today, that dream has become a necessity for all of us to move together towards the realisation of a prosperous, developed and integrated region. It is without doubt that SADC is a necessity for all of us.

It is of crucial importance that we recognise that our leaders have, at the highest level, committed SADC Member States to facilitate popular participation of the peoples of the region by putting in place mechanisms to enable SADC citizens to become the driving agents of regional integration. As a matter of fact, they said any other way would make regional integration a mere pipedream. The SADC Declaration and Treaty states that: **“Regional integration will continue to be a pipe dream unless the peoples of the region determine its content, form and direction, and are themselves its active agent”**. The SADC Declaration and Treaty further states that: **“Measures will, therefore, be taken and appropriate mechanisms and institutional framework put in place; to involve the people of the region in the process of regional integration”**.

This is a Clarion Call to all of us – especially those of us involved in the dissemination of public information. In addition to the SADC Declaration and Treaty, other SADC instruments such as the SADC Protocol on Culture, Information and Sport; the SADC Declaration on the Role of Information and Communication in Building SADC; the SADC Communications and Promotional Strategy; and others, enjoins Member States to “develop a regional information infrastructure to facilitate information exchange in the areas of culture, information and sport”.

Conversely, this means the political will has been expressed at the highest level of the leadership of our region. What is now left is for us both at the Secretariat and the media industry in each Member State to work together to realise those commitments. We have an obligation to find solutions that will move our region forward. We owe that to the citizens of this region. If we seek to ensure solidarity, growth and prosperity, we must seek it together. I believe that through common solutions to common problems, we stand a better chance of succeeding in what we set out to achieve.

In supporting media freedom in the region, SADC laid a fertile ground for the emergence of World Press Freedom Day, commemorated on the 3rd of May each year in fulfillment of the Windhoek Declaration on press freedom adopted by UNESCO in 1991. Media freedom and access to information feed into the wider development objective of empowering people. Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social and political process that helps people gain control over their own lives. This can only be achieved through access to accurate, fair and unbiased information, representing a plurality of opinions, and the means to actively communicate vertically and horizontally, thereby participating in the active life of the community. It is therefore clear that media freedom is meaningless without access to information.

I am aware that all of you gathered in this room, have vast experiences accumulated over the years in supporting the flow of information in the SADC Region in particular and thereby, contributing to the SADC Regional Integration agenda in general. I have, however, observed that the gap between what SADC does and what the members of the public get to know is wide. This gap needs to be eradicated to enable popular participation in SADC regional agenda.

For this reason, I look at this meeting as a critical input in the process - representing the first and crucial engagement

between the Secretariat and Botswana based media to re-think and re-engineer the manner in which the citizens of the region can easily access information on and about SADC. I believe this type of engagement should become a common fixture between the Secretariat and the media in the Republic of Botswana. On our part, I wish to assure you that the Secretariat will hold regular media briefings upon the conclusion of each SADC policy meeting, and any such meeting whose outcome impacts on our region and peoples. The Secretariat opens its doors to you, from this hour onwards, to access information on SADC activities, programmes, projects and policies for dissemination to the SADC citizenry. On the other hand, the Secretariat wishes to grant you this opportunity to make proposals on the best way you wish to access SADC information for dissemination nationally and regionally.

Today, as we take this giant step in repositioning communication between SADC and the people of the region, we have the daunting task of affording the people of the SADC Region the opportunity to become architects of their destiny through communication and information flow. This is the challenge that we must embrace in the spirit of moving our region forward.

Let us, therefore, purposefully and meaningfully contribute to the birth of a new means of communicating the SADC message to the region and beyond. The process that we are about to begin here is a significant enabler to regional development and integration.

With these few remarks, I wish to once again welcome you to the Secretariat and open the doors for you to access information on SADC activities, programmes and policies to enable the citizens of the region to know more about SADC.

We have no doubt that you have been our partners and will continue to be our partners in the pursuit of moving the SADC integration agenda to higher heights.

I thank you