

Tanzania Media Fund Launch December 3rd, 2008

Statement by Swiss Ambassador Adrian Schlaepfer

Honorable Samuel Sitta, Speaker of the Parliament, honorable Sofia Simba, Minister of State for Good Governance, representatives of Government, of the Media, of Civil Society, of development partners, distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure for me to be here today in representation of the 5 donors of the Tanzania Media Fund (UK, Ireland, Denmark, Netherlands and Switzerland). This is a very special day for journalism in Tanzania - it was about 2½ years ago when the idea came up to establish a fund that would contribute to the development of high quality and professional media. And it is with a sense of profound satisfaction that we now see this idea transformed into a substantial programme (*the Tanzania Media Fund*) - ready to take off today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

free and independent media of high quality and rich diversity help advance economic and social development. It is often through the media that people can be reached most effectively and this is especially true in rural areas. Access to quality information empowers people to exercise their civic rights and duties, it serves local communities, helps combat corruption, and acts as a catalyst for debate and protest - all elements that are vital for development in a democratic society. But media themselves can also act as agents of change. Indeed, strong and independent media are forceful vectors in the fight against poverty and

ignorance in any country - Tanzania is no exception. On the other hand, the sometimes very low quality of journalism is a concern, as is the lack of trained journalists. Recent studies have shown that not less than 98% of working journalists expressed a need for further professional training. These are the key reasons why we support the Tanzania Media Fund – a innovative programme that will strengthen investigative and high quality journalism through a blend of measures, including grants, training and legal assistance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since my arrival last January, I have been able to witness a series of moments and events where the media have played an instrumental role in the political process of the country. And indeed I have been quite impressed by the vibrancy and openness of debate. We are seeing a clear trend to a more open, critical and professional media. Government has of course played a vital role in this by upholding the principle of freedom of expression and ensuring a conducive environment. However, as we have seen recently and as highlighted by the Media Council of Tanzania in its latest update on the State of the Media Report, the legal and regulatory framework in which the Media operate, and its application, remain a challenge. The philosophy underlying the old Newspaper Act is not necessarily supportive to universal access to information and freedom of expression as enshrined both in the Constitution of Tanzania (Art. 18) and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to which Tanzania is a signatory. For effective media to thrive there is a need for state-of-the-art laws and regulations. The respective proposal made recently by a strong domestic coalition is commendable. We would like to see government address this deficiency

expeditiously and hope that a solid proposal duly discussed with stakeholders for a Right to Information Act and Media Services Bill be tabled in Parliament without further delay.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Tanzania Media Fund will not work in isolation. It is implemented in partnership and complementarity with other actors and institutions such as the Media Council of Tanzania, the Editors' Forum, the Media Institute of Southern Africa, and the Union of Tanzanian Press Clubs. As donors, we consider it essential too that the TMF work with a high degree of autonomy, under the guidance of an independent steering committee made up of personalities known for their professionalism, commitment and integrity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our expectations regarding the TMF are high. I am confident that the management team, led by HIVOS, will be able to meet such expectations. It has rightly adopted a 'learning by doing' approach which allows to take risks while capitalising on success. The Fund needs to be flexible and innovative, in balance with stewardship, transparency and accountability.

In three years from now, we hope to see the TMF established as a truly Tanzanian owned, well known and highly respected grant giving organisation with a diversified funding base. We wish them well!

Asante sana.