



**REPUBLIC OF KENYA**

**MINISTRY OF INFORMATION, COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY**

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**SPEECH BY THE PRINCIPAL SECRETARY, STATE DEPARTMENT FOR  
BROADCASTING AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS, MRS FATUMA HIRSI  
MOHAMED, CBS, DURING THE COMMEMORATION OF THE WORLD RADIO  
DAY ON 13<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY, 2019 AT THE CROWNE PLAZA HOTEL, NAIROBI**

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I want to express my pleasure in joining you in marking the 2019 World Radio Day. This year's celebration theme of “***Dialogue, Tolerance and Peace***” with special focus on the topic of “***Government as a Source and Subject of Media Reporting***” coincides with a time when the Kenyan radio is 92 years old and has been recorded as the media with the highest number of listeners in the country. Radio is amongst the fastest growing medium of information exchange and dissemination in

Kenya. Indeed, the fact that the radio has grown from a few stations a few years ago to the current 179 FM stations is the clearest attestation that most Kenyans rely on radio as a source of information.

The Government realizes that the effectiveness of Kenya's right to information is dependent on its commitment to effectively implement freedom of information laws and the protection and promotion of these rights. As part of this commitment, the Ministry of ICT last month launched a 15-member taskforce that will look into improving Information and communications functions of Government activities concerning social, economic and political development in the country.

The Ministry would like to encourage and support advocacy initiatives, both by public agencies like the Media Council as well as private organizations which may be willing to utilize this diversity of opportunities to advance the right to access information.

The media and the public at large should also exercise their rights to know and by so doing, create a demand to access of information.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

The Government is aware that with the increased number of vernacular radio stations, a large listenership at the grassroots level is reached. The fact that these stations broadcast in the vernacular of the target audience provides a unique opportunity to build trust, correcting misperceptions and prejudices, and educating the masses on the values of diversity and peaceful co-existence. It can be used to crowd-source for early warning by publicizing existing avenues for communicating such information. Media promotes peace by affecting knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of a critical mass of people. Similarly, the media promotes peace by providing an information conduit between dissenting groups, thus reducing prejudice and stereotypes between them. In targeting the political elite, media interventions promote peace by placing pressure to move towards a resolution.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The role played by the media in Kenya in steering the country's political, economic and social development wheel is great. The media has the key function to inform public

opinion and to monitor whether the Government is keeping its promises. Radio in particular and media in general has for the last one decade played a crucial role in advancing democratic governance, reforms and accountability in the country. It has continued to take a central position in the on-going political, legal and constitutional reforms in the country. It is now evident, therefore, that strong, independent and professional media can make a positive contribution to the much needed national cohesion and peace building in the country. This is through presentation of diverse opinions, ideas and discussions on issues of public interest that inform the people in their choice of leaders, both at National and County Governments. This leads to the improvement of professionalism and effectiveness of media practitioners and strengthening the existing media landscape which are crucial pre-election preparatory processes.

As a result of their ability to reach and influence large numbers of people, the media is perceived to carry immense power in socialization and shaping the course of people's attitudes and behaviour. Fair and accurate journalism and media content that builds confidence and counteracts misperceptions have great potential in security and disaster

management. The power of media to influence the cause of conflict, policy and intervention has been dubbed the “CNN Effect”. This effect creates a triangular relationship between media, government and the public.

The Kenya Vision 2030 identifies access to information as a key enabler supporting the Vision’s pillars in attaining wealth creation, social welfare and international competitiveness. Further, it identifies information technology as one of the key facilitators to deliver the 10% annual economic growth rate envisaged under the economic pillar. To achieve this, transformation of Kenya’s media sector to an innovative, focused, independent and accountable sector is critical.

Article 35 of the constitution provides that every citizen has the right to access information. The legislature has gone further and enacted the Access to Information Act 2016 to actualize the provisions of Article 35 of the Constitution which among other things obliges public institutions like the Media Council of Kenya to proactively disclose information to the public.

The Government is committed to the proactive disclosure of information and the overall protection of the media to enable media play its rightful role in governance and accountability.

Members of the Fourth Estate;

We are aware of challenges facing the media including welfare and working environment, safety concerns by journalists, and a number of issues have been raised that need attention. The issue of corruption in media must be addressed and tackled immediately. Corruption has led to loss of credibility amongst journalists and trust from people. We must work to restore this credibility and trust from people, otherwise, we will have ourselves to blame. News from our journalists has become very predictable, where those with power, access and money, dominate our news.

The issue of professionalism and adherence to professional ethics as provided for in the law cannot be neglected. Some journalists seem to have abandoned their ethics and write stories, that are to say the least, half-baked news. Our media is full of stories without facts, biased and lacking in objectivity. Cases of defamation against the media are on the increase.

Article 35 guarantees the right to Access to Information where there's a right to access: "information held by the State; and information held by another person and required for the exercise or protection of any right or fundamental freedom,"

By virtue of being the biggest single source of information to the media, the government is also the most common subject of media reporting. The role of media in disseminating public information often comes under sharp focus during disasters, when the government is rolling out major projects, issues of governance and insecurity.

While the Access to Information Act 2016 guarantees the public to access government information, the media ought to appreciate that there are circumstances where information cannot be published especially if it affects state security or it is likely to put lives at risk. Government will sometimes decline to supply information if it is the subject of military strategy, intelligence activities, cabinet documents and infringement of privacy. When this happens media is often called upon to exercise self-regulation and weigh what to write to inform the public against the harm it is likely to cause.

**Thank You**