

## **UNESCO welcomes the establishment of an autonomous South Sudan Media Authority**

**Juba, 17<sup>th</sup> Feb 2016;** UNESCO has welcomed the establishment of an autonomous Media Regulatory Authority in South Sudan, to oversee the media industry in terms of regulation, media development and issuance of broadcasting licenses. This is expected to contribute to a vibrant, independent and pluralistic media in South Sudan, by curbing the increased rate of incidents affecting journalists, end impunity on crimes against journalists as well as create an enabling environment for the media to operate in.

Pledging its continued support to the development of the South Sudan media sector, UNESCO, the UN lead Agency on Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists, stressed the need for media donors and development partners to join efforts in supporting the full operationalization of the Media Authority and the establishment of the 8 specialized committees as outlined in the Media Authority Act, 2013.

This follows a visit to UNESCO office in Juba on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2016 by the newly appointed Media Authority Board members. Reaffirming their commitment to the tasks and mandate given to them, the Acting chairperson Ms. Atong Majok Kur said that in spite of the financial challenges they are facing related to lack of an office space to operate from, the necessary office staff, difficulties in mobility and ICT facilities to enable real time communication with the media stakeholders, the Media Authority is now in place and ready to engage with all the media stakeholders in execution of its duties.

The Media Authority Board Members also raised with UNESCO the need to be supported in exposing them to good practices through a regional study tour, to a well-established Media Authority such as the Media Council of Kenya and Tanzania. In addition, they also expressed the urgent need to put in place a Media Authority Strategic Plan with the support of experienced and successful Media authorities from the neighbouring countries.

Noting the important role the Media Authority is expected to play in the South Sudan media sector, UNESCO emphasised to the board members the need to safeguard the independence and integrity of the newly established institution, uphold the tenets of media freedom and safeguard the media, from clawback clauses such as the Media Authority Act Chapter 1. 5 which gives the interpretation of defamation to have the meaning assigned to it in the 2008 Penal Code.

In this regard, UNESCO reiterated its earlier call to have this interpretation of defamation as criminal offence, replaced with the definition provided under the same Media Act Chapter 28, which gives the interpretation of defamation as a civil offence in line with other internationally accepted media laws. UNESCO reiterated its commitment to support the Media Authority's key role in ensuring South Sudan is no longer listed in the global impunity index and ranked among the countries deteriorating in the media freedom rating.

South Sudan is one of the 5 Countries that have been implementing the UN Plan of Action on Safety of journalists and the issue of impunity. In 2015, 7 journalists were killed which greatly contributed to the country being ranked as second worst in Africa and 5<sup>th</sup> globally, on the Committee to Protect Journalists global impunity index. Reporters without Borders also ranked South Sudan as 125/180 countries on 2015 World Press Freedom Index, 6 positions down from the previous year. The Press Freedom Index reflects the degree of freedom that journalists, news organizations and netizens enjoy in each country, and the efforts made by the authorities to respect and ensure respect for this freedom. The Newly established South Sudan Media Authority is therefore expected to help in improving the country's ratings.