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# Transitional Processes and Rapid Response Assistance to Media in West Africa

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## **Introduction**

This paper is aimed at sharing the experience of the Partnership for Media and Conflict Prevention in West Africa, a unique effort by a coalition of international, regional and national organizations to help rebuild media in countries affected by conflict in West Africa, particularly Liberia and Ivory Coast, and to provide rapid assistance in a manner that meets local needs. The paper sets out the background to this initiative, the processes leading to the formation of the Partnership, its operational philosophy, structure and strategies, the key objectives of the Partnership and its activities so far.

More detailed information about these processes and activities are contained in a number of documents produced by the Partnership, including the “Strategy Paper” (based on the conclusions of the Accra meeting in July 2003); a “Memorandum of Understanding” drawn up in November 2003; and “Supporting the Media in Liberia: A Review of the Media Landscape for the Post-Conflict Transition Period”, which is a report of the assessment mission to Liberia undertaken by members of the Partnership in December 2003.

## **Background**

The media in a number of West African countries, most notably Sierra Leone and Liberia, have been victims of internecine conflicts for over a decade. Although the media in Ivory Coast has also been a victim of conflict, it is also considered, more than any other example in the region, to be a major contributor to the conflict in the country.

West Africa presents a diverse political environment with some countries experiencing repeated re-emergence of violent conflicts while others have remained stable and peaceful. But the experience of recent years has shown that instability in one country has the potential of spilling over into neighbouring countries and therefore, that violent conflicts can have regional implications. The most challenging cases of conflict in West Africa and their management have emerged in the Mano River region made up of Liberia, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone and Guinea. But they also present the greatest opportunities for a comprehensive rebuilding of whole media systems to enhance their capacity to meet the challenges of peace-building, national reconstruction, and democratisation.

In a sense, the conflicts in the Mano River region are all linked as the governments in each of the countries have frequently made claims that the conflicts in their countries were being instigated from one of the neighbouring countries, that the rebel movements were being armed and supported by neighbouring governments and that their attacks were usually launched from across their borders with a neighbouring country.

Since March 1991 when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) led by Foday Sankoh first attacked Bormalu, a village in Kailahun district east of Sierra Leone, an armed insurgency has

been waged against successive governments in the country resulting in the loss of over 250,000 lives over a period of a decade. After years of rebel activity, in May 1997, the Sierra Leone Army staged a coup against the democratically elected government of President Tejan Kabbah and established the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC), headed by Major Johnny Paul Koroma. The AFRC invited the RUF to join the new government. In February 1998, the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) recaptured the capital, Freetown, and other parts of the country also fell to the ceasefire monitoring group six months later. But a few months later, between December 1998 and January 1999, the RUF came close to capturing the capital again and toppling the government in a renewed offensive that took the government and ECOMOG by surprise.

The Lome Peace Agreement which was signed on July 7, 1999 to formally bring an end to the insurgency collapsed in May 2000 when the RUF took more than 500 UN peace keepers hostage and attempted to re-take Freetown. Only the quick intervention of British troops stopped the RUF from capturing Freetown and seizing power again.

Although the peace process was again brought on track and the situation in Sierra Leone appears to have stabilised, there are still tensions, which have apparently resulted in the recent extension by six months of the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), which was due to end in December 2004.

Liberia has been embroiled in violent conflicts for more than 14 years. From 1989 to 1996 a civil war raged in the country, resulting in the death of over 200,000 people and the displacement of about 500,000. Although the election of former warlord, Charles Taylor, as President in 1997 brought an end to large-scale conflict, small-scale fighting continued around the country. With

the formation of two major rebel groups, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), the situation deteriorated badly.

In June 2003, the Special Court for Sierra Leone announced the indictment of President Taylor for war crimes allegedly committed in Sierra Leone, marking a new turn in the Liberian conflict. On August 18, 2003, the Accra Peace Agreement was signed between the government and the rebel groups, under which President Taylor was to temporarily hand over power to his vice president, Moses Blah, and take asylum in Nigeria. The Agreement provided for a power-sharing administration under a transitional national government headed by Gyude Bryant and for democratic elections to be held no later than 2005.

Ivory Coast is engaged in a conflict that has split the country in two. The southern section is controlled by the government of President Laurent Gbagbo, whilst the north is held by the rebel group, Movement Patriotique de la Côte d'Ivoire (MPCD).

Although the conflict appeared to have erupted rapidly, in reality, the signs had been evident since 1993 following the death of President Félix Houphouët-Boigny, who had brought economic growth and political stability to the country under a one-party rule, despite the inadequacies of his government. Since then, three consecutive leaders, Henri Konan Bédié, General Robert Guei and Laurent Gbagbo, have all fuelled ethnic and religious differences in order to maintain their hold on power. Under these leaders, the concept of Ivoirité (the “pure” Ivorian) has been introduced and reinforced in a country with traditionally large immigrant populations, resulting in a wave of xenophobia, violent inter-ethnic tensions and clashes, and accusations of discrimination and persecution by the communities from the north of the country.

After a coup in December 1999 and elections in October 2000, Laurent Gbagbo was declared President, although the elections were marred by violence and irregularities. Gbagbo continued to pursue the concept of “Ivoirité” to maintain his grip on power, while promoting members of his own ethnic group. The latest uprising started when a small group of troops revolted after the government tried to demobilise them, attacking three major cities, namely Abidjan, Bouake and Korhogo. Subsequently others have joined the insurgents, mostly believed to be MPCCI and supporters of Alassane Ouattara, a northern politician who was previously Prime Minister under President Houphouët-Boigny’s government.

Following the military and political intervention of France, the government of President Gbagbo was not toppled by MPCCI. In October 2002, a ceasefire was signed between the MPCCI and President Gbagbo and peace talks began under the auspices of ECOWAS. However, very little progress has been made as a result of the distrust of both sides of the intentions of the other.

President Gbagbo claims that former soldiers from the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone have been active in the country and also accuses President Compaore of Burkina Faso of supporting the forces of rebellion in the north of the country. The potential for the conflict in Ivory Coast to have regional implications is therefore apparent. The country still holds large numbers of refugees, particularly from previous conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia and reports of human rights abuses have been widespread during the periods of the conflict.

### **Impact of Conflicts on Media**

In all of these situations, the first signs of an emerging or spreading conflict have frequently manifested in the form of restrictions on media freedom and freedom of expression generally.

These restrictions were either stringent or subtle control of the media, suppression of freedom of expression or the development of conflict-inciting media outlets.

The effects of the Liberian and Sierra Leonean conflicts on the media, both in its infrastructure and in its output, have been particularly catastrophic. In the case of Sierra Leone, journalists caught in the conflicts had to defend their lives from rebel forces as well as government forces. It is estimated that in all the violent conflicts and wars in Africa, no warlord has killed as many journalists as Foday Sankoh's RUF did during the protracted Sierra Leonean war.

The negative effects of violent conflict on media all over the world and particularly in West Africa are well documented and events over the past years show that the situation is worsening rather than improving. In weak democracies where media freedom is not adequately protected, state authorities often succeed in making the media a tool for nationalistic and xenophobic propaganda.

Moreover, in the extreme circumstances created by conflict, the parties involved often use both indirect and direct methods to coerce and control the media, and the creation of such an environment often leads to increased self-censorship amongst journalists as a form of self-protection.

The chaotic and disruptive nature of conflict, as seen in the West African context, also prevents structures designed to protect media freedom, such as monitoring and early warning networks, from functioning. Informal collaboration and collective structures often collapse due to divisions within society caused by conflict, the logistical and financial difficulties of continuing such activities, and direct obstruction from state authorities and armed groups. Legal harassment and

physical violence are often perpetrated against journalists and media outlets with impunity in order to silence them and intimidate the wider media community.

But as alluded to earlier, media also affect conflicts. This may be negatively, through inadvertent or overtly propagandistic or bias reporting, or positively, through the existence of a reliable, diverse and independent media that can contribute to societal reconciliation, acting as a counterpoint to the misinformation and broadening understanding of the grievances and causes of conflict.

Negative reporting in the media based upon ethnic, political or religious biases can aggravate tensions and conflicts. This can be caused by the absence of basic professional standards and reliance on emotive self-expression or simply as a result of the lack of opportunities for journalists to receive such training in the first place. Conversely, professional and balanced reporting can reduce tensions and help to resolve conflict situations.

Conflict, with the attendant political and financial uncertainties created by it, also often have the result of undermining the individual and collective strength of the media. Income can be lost and infrastructure destroyed or looted, as was the case in Liberia. Harassment of individual journalists and media outlets can also result in the disempowerment of the media both as individuals and as a collective as they struggle for survival and embark on self-censorship or become co-opted into the propaganda machine of government or rebel forces.

The opening created by a post-conflict period and the existence of a transitional arrangement provides a great opportunity for outside intervention to help rebuild the media and put in place a framework that will enable the media to contribute positively to peace-building, national reconciliation, reconstruction and democratization.

## **Partnership for Media and Conflict Prevention in West Africa**

The process leading to the formation of the Partnership for Media and Conflict Prevention in West Africa began with discussions at the “Assistance to Media in Tension Areas and Violent Conflict” seminar hosted by United the Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) in Stockholm in May 2003.

Following those discussions, between July 6 and 8, 2003, a meeting was held in Accra, Ghana, to analyse media and conflict in West Africa, with a specific focus on Liberia and Ivory Coast. The meeting was hosted by the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), in collaboration with International Media Support (IMS), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and UNESCO.

Participants at the meeting came from a broad mix of intergovernmental organisations, government agencies, donor institutions, as well as human rights organisations, media associations and NGOs of national, regional and international character. The participants included representatives of Article 19 (the Global Campaign for Free Expression), the Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CFJE), the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), Media Action International, Search for Common Ground, Union des Journalistes de Cote d’Ivoire, the Association of Journalists for Peace in Cote d’Ivoire, the Press Union of Liberia (PUL), Media Rights Agenda (MRA), Panos Institute West Africa (PIWA) and Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ).

Out of this meeting emerged a strategy paper, which was finalised in October 2003. The paper sought to provide a broad analysis on the role of the media in West African conflicts and identify how national media communities could be supported by regional and international actors in periods of crisis, as well as play a central role in conflict management, including prevention and resolution. The paper also explored the potential for support between national West African media communities in times of crisis and focused specifically on the situations in Liberia and Ivory Coast as pressing current examples of where joint action could facilitate implementation and maximise impact.

The meeting also resulted in the formation of the Partnership on Media and Conflict Prevention in West Africa. The objective of the Partnership is to facilitate the provision of rapid and collaborative support to the media to pre-empt and mitigate the effects of conflict and their humanitarian consequences. The understanding is that the Partnership would utilise the diverse expertise and resources available amongst national, regional and international stakeholders, thereby offering a unique approach for the provision of assistance. It was also thought that holistic interventions relevant to local needs and reflecting the objectives of international institutions could be designed and implemented to cover the broad spectrum of media related concerns that may arise as a result of conflict.

The basic philosophy of the partnership is that there is a need to build upon existing forms of collaboration and avoid unnecessary duplication. In seeking to actualise this, the agencies and organisations involved in this national, regional and international partnership agreed to coordinate their actions around a common strategy and undertake specific collaborative interventions in areas affected by violent conflict in West Africa to promote and strengthen media freedom and improve the working conditions of local media practitioners and institutions.

The partnership also agreed to facilitate the exchange and pooling of knowledge and resources between the countries in the sub-region. For instance, it was expected that the experience gained in the conflict situation in Sierra Leone could have relevance for activities addressing the conflicts in Liberia or Ivory Coast. Likewise, media development or conflict resolution perspectives developed in Ghana or Nigeria may be relevant for Sierra Leone and so on.

In order to provide clarity in its operations and activities, the Partnership set out its guiding principles and operational strategy in a Memorandum of Understanding under which the partners agreed to cooperate at three successive levels with the understanding that active engagement in each level would be at the discretion of each member organization, although it was recognized that one level would in theory lead to the next, resulting in properly coordinated and collaborative processes. It was also understood that the collaboration would be flexible, thereby allowing different processes to be followed in the various countries, as may be most suitable to the local circumstances.

The Media Foundation West Africa was designated to act as the focal organization for the Partnership while the International Media Support would provide the MFWA with assistance and support in this role as and when required.

The member organizations in the Partnership agreed to engage in the following collaborative actions as per the three levels of cooperation:

#### Level One: Information Sharing

The Partnership organizations agreed to:

- Share information about their goals and activities in West Africa to the fullest extent possible, as well as other relevant information they may have access to;
- Contribute to the creation and maintenance of specific information sharing tools (to be managed by the focal organization);
- When possible, support the focal organization with the practical realization of compiling and sharing information; and
- When possible, attend meetings to discuss activities in West Africa.

### Level Two: Short-Term Perspectives

Based upon the information sharing under Level One, the Partnership organizations also agreed to:

- Jointly identify issues of concern relating to media and conflict in West Africa;
- Undertake both desk and field-based situation assessments;
- Prioritize needs and design specific interventions to address them;
- Form national, regional, and international project activity partnerships to implement specific short-term interventions; and
- Ensure the involvement of long-term specialized actors and donors in all short-term activities.

### Level Three: Long-Term Perspectives

Based upon the short-term activities under Level Two, the Partnership organizations agreed to:

- Identify long-term needs of the media communities;
- Develop long-term holistic approaches and activities for addressing the identified needs;
- Form national, regional, and international project activity partnerships (or empower individual project holders) to implement specific long-term projects; and
- Identify and secure the necessary long-term funding to realize activities in a sustainable manner.

The structure of the Partnership was designed to be as flexible as possible to ensure that participation throughout the three levels of cooperation would be voluntary and based upon the commitment of the individual stakeholders.

But in order to provide an adaptable structure that would nonetheless be effective, structural issues and basic implementing steps to coordinate activities by thematic/geographic groups were agreed upon. These included the agreements that:

- The Partnership will discuss thematic and geographic issues in informal groups to be formed based upon the request of a reasonable number of Partnership members;
- All stakeholders in the field of media and conflict in West Africa are eligible to participate in these informal group discussions under the Partnership;
- Discussions in a group will be coordinated through the focal organization;
- The groups will be coordinated in an open and transparent process allowing for flexible participation on a partial or intensive basis;
- To ensure a dynamic and efficient process through all three levels of cooperation, participants would base their inclusion in a group on the relevance of the specific thematic or geographic issue to their specific mandate and activities;

- The focal organization will be responsible for providing information about the discussions and/or decisions of the groups, as well as those activities agreed amongst the Partnership members; and
- Each Partnership member will have a focal person within their organizations who will be responsible for coordinating activities and sharing information.

Activities were to be undertaken by groups of relevant organizations on the identified specific focus areas. These groups were to be formed around the activities to be implemented. But the groups would be flexible and therefore able to change with the needs on the ground to include new members and allow for the exit of those that are no longer able to provide relevant inputs. In this manner, activities relating to a specific field would be able to move through the short, medium and long-term activity goals.

It was expected that seven groups would be formed in the beginning and an individual organization could belong to one or more of the groups at any one time. However, emphasis was placed on bringing together those organizations that have an active knowledge of, or available resources to put into, one of the specific activity fields. The groups were meant to be dynamic and flexible and it was therefore expected that all those involved would make active contributions in line with their abilities and funding. It was decided that the initial seven fields for the groups would be:

- Monitoring, Early Warning Networks and Humanitarian Information
- Association Building and Networking
- Safety and Legal Aid
- Legal and Institutional Reform
- Training and Media Coverage
- Professional Media
- Media Empowerment and Civil Society Linkage

The role and responsibilities of the focal organization were also spelt out. It was agreed that the focal organization would be responsible for:

- Acting as a central point for collecting and disseminating relevant information;
- Convening groups, including identifying relevant participants, maintaining e-mail based discussions and organizing meetings;
- Sharing information about the decisions and activities of the groups; and
- Assisting with the implementation of specific project activities by Partnership members.

With regard to project implementation and funding issues, it was agreed that funding for the project activities under levels One and Two would come from either the Partnership members or multi-lateral and bilateral donors, although the activities may be identified by the Partnership in response to funding already available, or to address specific needs with a subsequent approach to donors to secure funding.

As a set of basic funding considerations, the Partnership members agreed that:

- Funding secured for project activities under the auspices of the Partnership will be held by one or a number of the individual organisations responsible for the implementation of those activities;
- The Partnership will not apply for core funds and all financial responsibilities will be carried out by the individual organisations implementing activities together in groups under the Partnership's name; and
- Disbursement and accounting will be the responsibility of the individual Partnership organizations that have entered into the funding agreements with any donor.

### **Need for Rapid Collaborative Action**

We believe in the Partnership that rapid collaborative action by the international, regional and national media rights and media development communities is crucial for addressing the urgent needs of local media practitioners and institutions affected by conflict in West Africa. We are convinced that through timely, coordinated and efficient activities, the media can significantly assist in reducing the adverse conditions created by conflict. However, the ability to undertake rapid action with a view to preparing the ground for longer-term media development demands particular mechanisms and capacities that can only be achieved through coordination and the development of commonly adhered to strategy goals.

The international landscape of organizations and actors involved in media development, conflict resolution, human rights and promotion of fundamental freedoms in West Africa is broad. However, although conflict situations stimulate increased international attention by these actors, it also brings inhibiting factors that reduce institutional capacities and prevent rapid collaborative responses. A lack of coordination can result in the various players working at cross-purposes and

placing focus on divergent goals. On the other hand, coordinated action and combined advocacy can yield far more significant results.

The ability to access funding quickly and have in place the necessary methodological tools for rapid implementation is also essential. The existence of a strategy specifically designed for a region or circumstance can assist in allowing for the quick identification of immediate needs, whilst also providing the opportunity for short and long-term activities to be mutually reinforcing.

Although the field of media development in conflict is relatively new, members of the Partnership have learnt significant lessons through the activities of the international community in areas such as Kosovo and Afghanistan or even Sierra Leone. The overarching conclusion of the past years is that coordinated and collaborative action by the international, regional and national media communities is essential in addressing emergency situations, both in terms of setting short and long-term objectives and activities.

In the short-term, effective and collaborative action depends on the rapid and timely identification of the media landscape and the potential trends and needs. At the same time, media development comes in several layers with all manner of complications and the numerous potential activities that need to be undertaken will have to be prioritized.

In order to develop an effective coordinated approach, the Partnership identified possible types of activities in relation to the specific competencies of the various national, regional and international actors. These include:

- ⇒ International level (including United Nations agencies, bilateral and multilateral donors and international NGOs).
- Linkages to larger peace-building efforts
  - International lobbying and advocacy activities
  - Coordination of different levels
  - International attention and action
  - International expertise on national or regional conflict
  - Funding for programmes and projects.
- ⇒ Regional level (regional organizations)
- Contact to inter-governmental bodies
  - Ensuring linkage of regional conflict issues and peace-building efforts
  - Regional lobbying and advocacy
  - Providing access to regional institutions, network and expertise in cross-border collaboration
  - Regional co-ordination activities and project implementation at regional level
  - Providing a platform for strategic and effective use of regional resources for national media and conflict efforts
  - Providing strategic input to long-term media development goals
- ⇒ National level (national media organizations and international actors/donors working at the national level)
- National lobbying and advocacy
  - Project implementation through national institutions and organizations
  - Partnerships with regional and international organizations

- Partnership for long-term media development goals
- Provision of bilateral funding

### **Activities of the Partnership for Media and Conflict Prevention in West Africa**

Between December 10 and 16, 2003, a team of regional and international media organizations traveled to Liberia to carry out an assessment of the media situation in the country. The organizations involved in the mission were UNESCO, OCHA, Panos Institute West Africa, Media Rights Agenda, MFWA, the International Media Support, the IFJ, the Canadian Journalist for Free Expression/International Freedom of Expression Exchange, and ARTICLE 19.

The joint objectives of the mission were to:

- Review the media situation in Liberia and the effects of the conflict;
- Compile a list of the main national, regional and international stakeholders in Liberia, including a comprehensive overview of their previous, current and foreseen activities; and
- Produce a list of priority areas clearly outlining both immediate and development related recommendations for support to the media and humanitarian information needs, including proposed activities and funding requirements.

In addition to the above objectives, the team was requested by UNESCO to provide input to the ongoing joint UNDG/World Bank needs assessment for the transitional government period. Under the sectoral cluster on Governance and Human Rights, the mission prepared recommendations for an immediate and medium-term approach to the development of media and freedom of expression in Liberia.

In the immediate term, it was crucial for the mission to provide recommendations that would address issues of relevance to the DDRR process. However, it was also emphasized that whilst the media has a role in peace-building, it is important that it develops as a free and independent actor with a responsibility for watching over good governance, public accountability and transparency. The mission was keenly aware that whilst the Accra Peace Agreement represents a real opportunity for the country to break the cycle of conflict and poor governance, the success of the peace-building and democratization process was not guaranteed.

The mission met with a wide range of Liberian media professionals cutting across the print and broadcast media, national and international civil society and NGO representatives, officials from the transitional government, UN agencies and the European Union, as well as members of the diplomatic community.

To enhance local Liberian involvement in the process, the PUL organized an open forum where the mission members presented some of their findings and discussed key issues with Liberian media professionals. The team also met with the Chairperson of the National Transitional Government, Mr. Gyude Bryant, and Mr. Jacques Paul Klein, the UN Under-Secretary General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General, who is also the Coordinator of United Nations Operations in Liberia.

Following the mission, the Partnership produced a comprehensive report titled: “Supporting the Media in Liberia: A Review of the Media Landscape for the Post-Conflict Transition Period” to guide its future activities but also to give other actors, either already active in Liberia or interested in working in the country, an insight into what the urgent needs are.

The 90-page report outlines collaborative approaches for supporting the media during the immediate and longer-term transition periods, both in overcoming obstacles and developing capacities and resources, as well as contributing towards the creation of lasting peace, stability and democracy.

The report addresses areas of media policy and legal reform; the print media; the independent broadcast media; public service broadcasting; humanitarian information; associations and networking; monitoring and advocacy; safety and legal aid; as well as training and media content.

Two of the activities recommended in the report are at the initial stages of implementation. These are the development of a Press Resource Center at the Press Union of Liberia and a comprehensive review of the legal, institutional, regulatory and policy framework for the media in Liberia.

One of the findings from the assessment mission was that owing to the poor state of infrastructure in the media, most of the newspapers require assistance in typesetting and laying out their stories and articles as many of them currently rent computer time or produce their materials at business centers. It was therefore recommended in the Partnership's report that the PUL could be equipped with a number of computers with appropriate industry software to assist the newspapers in typesetting their materials for publication. It was also suggested that the service should be provided to the newspapers by the PUL at an affordable cost aimed at reducing the present cost of production, but which will also enable the PUL to sustain the service after an initial donation of the equipment and provision of training.

Although the PUL presently has a Resource Center established in 2000 in its effort to provide access to information and basic resources for its members, the intermittent conflicts in Liberia since then have greatly affected the Center's output and many of the facilities are no longer operational. In addition, because of the limited financial capacity of the PUL, the Center is not able to provide services like secretarial support and desktop publishing, a reading room or library, venue for workshops, seminars, conferences, and other activities which are critical for the Liberian media.

The Center presently has only two functional computers, which are inadequate to cater to the increasing needs of the media community. The situation is worsened by the fact that the computers are second-hand and frequently freeze or breakdown.

As a first step in a process of helping the PUL develop its Press Resource Centre to function at an optimal level, a two-man team from the PUL was funded by the Partnership in January/February 2004 to undertake a study tour of press centers in Ghana and Nigeria to see how their experiences and best practices can be utilized in Liberia. In Ghana, the team toured the facilities of the Ghana International Press Center situated in Accra, which is owned and run by the Ghana Journalists Association and in Nigeria, the team visited the facilities of the International Press Center in Lagos, which is independent of the Nigeria Union of Journalists. Both institutions provide access to resources and facilities for media practitioners, including Internet services, conferences, workshops, research, and so forth. As a result of this mission, the PUL team made recommendations to the Partnership.

The Partnership has agreed to a three-phased long-term process of developing the Press Resource Center, which will enhance its potential to perform the following tasks:

- Provision of day-to-day working resources and facilities for media practitioners;
- Library and documentation resources to support investigative journalism;
- Venue for VIP lectures;
- Hosting conferences, roundtables, panel discussions, seminars and meetings on topics of interest or relevance for media community;
- Venue for short-term media training activities of the University of Liberia, the Liberia Institute of Journalism, international organizations, etc.; and
- Partnerships for joint projects with regional and international centers.

Under the three-phases of the project, the Partnership will provide, among other things, financial support and a range of equipment to the PUL, improve the skills of its personnel by providing necessary training, help it to develop a business plan to ensure sustainability; and assist the centre in developing its institutional structures which will guarantee the necessary independence for it to develop into a long-term asset for the media community as a whole, free from political influence or internal dispute.

As a first step in a comprehensive programme of media law and policy reform, a National Conference on Media Law Reform in Liberia is scheduled to be held in Monrovia at the end of June 2004. The goal of the conference is to initiate a consultative and collaborative process which will lead to the emergence of a blueprint for reforming media policy as well as the legal and institutional framework for media in Liberia.

The conference will bring together key local and international stakeholders to critically review all laws and policies which have implications for media practice in Liberia and agree on a programme of comprehensive reform leading to the emergence of a legal and institutional framework for the media, which takes local circumstances in Liberia into account, but

nonetheless meets regional and international standards for the protection of media freedom and freedom of expression. The conference is being planned in close consultation with key stakeholders in Liberia and with the active participation of the principal stakeholders.

A Taskforce that is broadly representative of the key stakeholders in the media law and policy reform project is being established to take primary responsibility for organizing and coordinating the Conference. The Taskforce is made up of one representative each of the PUL, women journalists, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Justice and civil society organizations. Two members of the Partnership, including UNESCO, will serve in an advisory capacity on the Taskforce. The Taskforce is one of the strategies for ensuring that the process has legitimacy and that stakeholders have ownership of both the process and its outcome.

## **Conclusion**

It is evidently too early to make any assessment of the success or otherwise of the Partnership approach in providing assistance to the media in transitional periods. This is because the Partnership has only been in existence for a very short time and is only really just beginning its engagement in Liberia. Besides, many of its structures and operational principles are still being developed. A further partnership meeting is scheduled to take place in Copenhagen, Denmark, on May 14 and 15, 2004 in a continuing effort to ensure a common vision among all partnership members and to finalize operational issues.

However, the theoretical underpinnings of the Partnership present it as a model worth trying and supporting. Its basic objective of facilitating the provision of rapid and collaborative support to the media to pre-empt and mitigate the causes and effects of conflict and their humanitarian consequences is founded on good reasoning. Its approach of utilising the diverse expertise and

resources available amongst national, regional and international stakeholders, thereby offering a unique approach in the provision of assistance is, in my view, very sound. Its philosophy of implementing interventions which are relevant to local needs while at the same time reflecting the objectives of international institutions is one which cannot be impugned.

I am convinced that this collaborative process will serve to enhance the potential impact of international interventions and create stronger chances for sustainability, by ensuring strong local ownership and the division of tasks between short and long-term international actors.

All experiences in countries where there has been poor coordination and competition for funding among national, regional and international organizations has resulted in the execution of ill-conceived and overlapping activities, with the result that many activities were duplicated and resources wasted. In most cases, the results have ranged from the mediocre to the disastrous.

Thank you.