CONFERENCE ON ENHANCING MEDIA-CSO COLLABORATION TOWARDS THE 2022 GENERAL ELECTION

COMMUNIQUE

Nairobi, October 28, 2021

More than 40 delegates drawn from the media and Civil Society groups attending a two-day conference in Nairobi on October 21-22, 2021 convened under the coordination of the Kenya Correspondents Association (KCA) deliberated extensively on emerging issues in the run up to the 2022 General Elections.

The participants underscored the important role played jointly by the media and civil society groups as watchdogs for the society, in holding the government and other public institutions accountable in matters of governance, democracy and the rule of law.

The conference was jointly organised by KCA, The Kenyan Section of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ Kenya), Election Observation Group (ELOG), Mzalendo Trust, Katiba Institute, Transparency International – Kenya (TI-Kenya), Article 19, Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) and Defenders Coalition.

Key speakers at the conference, who included European Union Ambassador to Kenya Ms Henriette Geiger and the Executive Director of the Open Society Initiative for Eastern Africa (OSIEA) George Kegoro, called for closer collaboration between the media and civil society to help the country focus on key issues and realize free, fair and credible elections.

The conference noted that as country moves towards the 2022 General Elections, concerns remain on a number of issues including: delay in effecting critical electoral reforms, elections campaign financing, the disruptions with new legislative proposals from Parliament, release of funds and underfunding of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) as well as its lack of a substantive Chief Executive Officer (CEO), factors which are likely to hinder election preparations.

The participants reviewed previous elections and issues that often impact on press freedom and other civil liberties as well as the safety and security of the citizenry. They noted that the devolved system of governance had brought up new social, economic and political challenges that continue to impact electoral processes.
These dynamics as well as a fairly hostile environment, they said, continue to impact the gains made by the media and civil society actors towards the realization of credible, peaceful, free and transparent elections as the country heads towards the August 2022 General Elections.

Additionally, they observed that the COVID-19 pandemic had adversely affected the operational timelines of key duty bearers and actors in Kenya and on a global-scale with an inevitable trickle-down effect on elections and electoral processes.

The conference further observed that inadequate access to information, freedom of expression, rampant corruption, non-adherence ethical leadership, national values and accountable governance were among the critical issues that need to be mainstreamed as fundamental discussions during the electioneering period through the media.

The participants expressed concern over the increasing political polarization in the country observing that the increasing toxic pronouncements from the leaders and supporters of the emerging political factions will impact the country negatively and lead to conflicts and insecurity in many parts of the country.

The conference emphasised the need for a multi-institutional approach by various stakeholders such as the media, civil-society organizations, and faith-based organizations among others, to advocate for timely enactment of electoral reforms as well as the discharge of other electoral-related activities by relevant state and non-state actors, if the country is to realize a free, transparent, peaceful and credible elections that will guarantee stability.

On the urgency and need for closer collaboration between the media and civil society actors, the conference noted the power of the solidarity and synergy between the two sectors in offering space and opportunities for rallying key state and non-state actors in discussing and making recommendations that inform electoral reforms and processes.

Further, the media and civil-society had also collaborated towards encouraging active citizens’ engagement and participation in the democratic and electoral processes as well as offered alternative voices and shaped debates on critical issues that need to be mainstreamed in the electioneering period.

The participants noted that the conference had provided an important opportunity and platform to enhance and nurture partnership between the media and civil society groups to share their experience and recommendations ahead of the 2022 General Elections.

The conference concluded with a commitment by the media and CSO organizations to:

a) enhance partnership towards the promotion of good governance and accountability by providing accurate, balanced and timely information that is of interest and relevance to the public;

b) promote continuous collaboration to educate the citizens, hold the state, its agencies leaders accountable as part of efforts to push back efforts aimed at closing the civic space;
c) Guard against any threats to press freedom to safeguard the important role of the media during the electoral period;

d) Guard against any attacks threats to the Judicial institutions, judicial officers and staff to uphold the rule of law and democracy;

e) Monitor closely legislative developments and continuously engage the public with a view of amplifying their voices during this electioneering period.

f) Enhance and sustain engagement with the Independent Elections and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) in an effort to ensure openness and speed in the implementation of all the measures that contribute to a transparent and credible electoral process and outcome.

Signed:

Kenya Correspondence Association (KCA)
The Kenyan Section of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ Kenya),
Election Observation Group (ELOG),
Mzalendo Trust,
Katiba Institute,
Transparency International – Kenya (TI-Kenya),
Article 19, EA
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