



For immediate release – 8 May 2009

Kenya: Civil Society Adopt the *Machakos Declaration* on Freedom of Expression in Kenya

ARTICLE 19 Kenya/East Africa organised a ground-breaking forum on freedom of expression in Kenya which brought together representatives from Kenyan civil society including media professionals, academics, human rights defenders, and youth and community representatives in Machakos. The meeting resulted in the adoption of the *Machakos Declaration on Freedom of Expression in Kenya*

Participants to *The Forum on Freedom of Expression in Kenya: The Way Forward – A Social Audit of the Status Quo* sought to assess and debate the constitutional, legal, policy and practical constraints, challenges and opportunities to freedom of expression, and to identify a set of effective interventions to tackle problems and abuses, including through advocacy and campaigning, outreach, and policy support.

The debate resulted in the adoption of the *Machakos Declaration* (see www.article19.org/pdfs/press/kenya-declaration-of-the-forum-on-freedom-of-expression.pdf) which reiterates the universal principles, treaties and provisions of freedom of expression, including Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights and Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACPHR).

The *Machakos Declaration* calls for constitutional, legal and policy reform based on international best practice and standards so as to situate freedom of expression at the core of the political reform process in Kenya.

ARTICLE 19 Kenya board member, Commissioner Lawrence Mute, commented that “participants to the forum have clearly reaffirmed that freedom of expression is a cornerstone right in the social, political and economic transformation of society.”

The *Machakos Declaration* calls for the repeal of retrogressive legislation that impinges on freedom of expression, like the Official Secrets Acts and of other instances in the penal code. The *Machakos Declaration* demands the enactment of the Freedom of Information bill, the adoption of progressive hate speech legislation, and the amendment of the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation Act to establish a public service broadcaster, independent of government control.

“The *Machakos Declaration* recognises the direct links between freedom of expression and human rights, democratic reform, good governance and poverty reduction” said Ms Jasmine O’Connor, Senior Director with ARTICLE 19.

The *Machakos Declaration* highlights the need for a plural and diverse professional media, and the role that modern technology may play to enhance freedom of expression. The *Machakos Declaration* also calls for the protection of academic freedom, essential to the generation and dissemination of knowledge.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- The meeting was supported by Ford Foundation East Africa and UNESCO Kenya
- For more information: please contact Jasmine O'Connor, ARTICLE 19 Senior Director, at jasmine@article19.org Tel: +44-207278 9292
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.