

**For immediate release:  
GEM Summit calls on SADC leaders to adopt gender protocol**

12 August 2008: The third Gender and Media (GEM) summit ended in Johannesburg today with a call for the adoption of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development that includes strong provisions for achieving gender balance and sensitivity in the media.

The summit took place on the eve of the annual meeting of leaders of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) from 16-17 August where the protocol that has been in the making for several years is expected to be adopted.

In a statement, the 180 media practitioners, analysts, activists, critics and editors urged the region's leaders to "put their money where their mouth is" by adopting the protocol which sets twenty targets for achieving gender equality by 2015. Describing the Protocol "as the most far reaching of any sub-regional instrument for achieving gender equality," participants said it is time for Southern Africa to move from being "a region of commitments to one of action."

Among the targets in the Protocol are the achievement of 50% women in all areas of decision-making; reducing of gender violence by half of the current levels; ensuring that all Constitutions in the region have a provision for gender equality that is not contradicted by any law or custom as well as a range of targets for the economic empowerment of women by 2015.

The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) in 2005 showed that women constitute 19 percent of news sources in Southern Africa (compared to 21 percent globally). The regional Gender and Media Baseline Study in 2003 showed that women constitute less than a quarter of journalists in the region and less than 5 percent of media owners and managers.

The SADC Gender Protocol urges the media, which has some of the most glaring gender gaps in the SADC region, to ensure that gender parity is achieved in all areas of its work over the next seven years. It calls on media houses, media regulators and training institutions to mainstream media in their work and to ensure that the views and voices of women and men are equally heard in media content. The Protocol urges the media to guard against negative gender stereotyping and to become part of the solution rather than of the problem in its coverage of gender violence.

The GEM Summit, held under the theme "critical citizens, responsive media" welcomed the provisions in the SADC Protocol as "providing a guiding framework for our collective efforts to ensure a media in the region that is not guilty of censorship through the silencing of half of our region's population."

During the two day summit that commenced with the Gender and Media Awards 48 presenters from the region, Sweden, the USA and India shared examples of training, policy and research initiatives that are awakening the media in the region to the need for change.

Key new initiatives include the region-wide Glass Ceiling in Media Houses research that Gender Links, a convener of the Summit, is extending across Southern Africa after the South African study last year showed that the media falls far short of equity targets.

Members of the Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) network, another summit convenor gave examples of alerts they have taken up, including a woman's body being compared to a hamburger in South Africa; used to advertise a money changing facility in Mauritius that were removed as a result of the complaints.

The Botswana chapter of GEMSA gave a case study of complaints taken up against a cartoon depicting a woman politician who failed in her leadership bid as a castrated cow and the subsequent workshop with cartoonist to debate rights and responsibilities where freedom of speech and participation is concerned.

The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), the third summit convenor and the region's main freedom of expression lobby group, gave a case study of how it plans to mainstream gender in its African Media Barometer. MISA Zimbabwe presented an overview of alerts it has been issuing on media freedom violations in that country.

The Higher Media Authority of the DRC, Advertising Association Authority (AAA) of South Africa, Media Council of Tanzania and Botswana Press Council presented case studies of their efforts to mainstream gender into their codes of practice. The conference strongly urged the Botswana government, and all governments in the SADC region to abandon plans for replacing self regulatory bodies with statutory bodies for the regulation of the media that undermine press freedom.

Several media houses that are part of the Media Action Plan on HIV AIDS and Gender spoke of newsroom level efforts to improve coverage and practice in these areas.

Editors of tabloids responded to research showing that while this mushrooming media form is broadening the reading public it also often promotes some of the worst gender stereotypes and in South Africa fuels xenophobic violence. The Voice of Botswana - winner of the award on good media practice on HIV and AIDS - and the Swazi Observer shared audience research conducted with GL on how their readers are ready for a more diverse media menu.

A key new development in the region are media literacy pilot projects under the auspices of the Gender and Media Diversity Centre, a partnership between media development NGOs and knowledge institutions in the region. These programmes empower citizens to engage critically with their media. The summit concluded that "critical citizens and a responsive media are not only key to achieving gender equality, but also to building democracy in our region."

For more information about the GEM Summit:

<http://www.genderlinks.org.za>

For more information about the Gender Protocol:

[http://www.genderlinks.org.za/page.php?p\\_id=265](http://www.genderlinks.org.za/page.php?p_id=265)

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