

Dead Sea Declaration on support for Community Media

More than 120 media practitioners from 14 countries of the Middle East and North Africa participated in the third regional conference on community media, held in the Dead Sea area of Jordan, under the title “Our Independent Voices” from 24th to 26th of February 2014.

Contributions from community media in Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Libya, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Yemen, Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Oman inspired participants to reflect on the importance of this form of broadcasting with community ownership and local content.

Our third conference succeeded in cooperation with Jordan’s Audio Visual Commission and the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) with support from Swedish Agency for International Development, the UK’s Foreign and Commonwealth office, the Open Society Foundations, and International Media Support.

Participants stressed the importance of community media in developing local communities in countries of the region and the need for an enabling legal and administrative environment to support and sustain the work of radio stations in local communities.

The conference witnessed a strong participation of Syrians from newly launched independent community radio stations. Participants from the region voiced their solidarity with Syrian radio practitioners who carry the voice of Syrians in an objective way despite the security difficulties. Participants also applauded the agreement by several stations of a code of ethics that organizes the conduct of workers in these stations, stressing their right to freedom of expression, and the plurality and professionalism of their work away from hate and biased speech.

Participants at the conference reached consensus on the following:

1. The need for laws and regulations in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa to be consistent with international standards in regards to the right of peoples to own local media.
2. The urgent need for concerted efforts by civil society to ensure the existence, continuity and sustainability of community media without political interference from central authorities.

3. The importance of civil societies that own and run community media to respect the principles of professionalism, credibility and plurality while staying away from hate speech, racism, and sectarianism.
4. The importance of learning from local, regional and international experiences in setting up and sustaining community media.
5. The need for the protection of workers, equipment and institutions of community media in the region, especially in countries that are witnessing security challenges and interference in the content of these media organisations.
6. The need to speeding up the process of translating new constitutions adopted in some countries, due to the efforts of civil society organisations, into laws and regulations that support and sustain the work of these media organizations.
7. The importance of the transition from the stage of seeking recognition of community media to action on sustainability through the creation of local, regional and international funds that strengthen these organizations without such support influencing or interfering with professional content.
8. The need to work on increasing networking and coordinating efforts between practitioners of these community media organizations through the creation of an interactive data base that serves the activists and increases the coordination, cooperation and exchange of experiences.
9. The need to find mechanisms to develop software that supports different languages present in the region such as Kurdish, Amazigh and Syriac as well as the needs of workers in these radio and community media organizations.
10. The need to document and expose abuses and harassment of journalists in community-based broadcasting organizations and for civil society and human rights organizations active in the field of defending the right of expression to engage in advocacy to address these abuses and harassment.
11. The need to amend existing laws and regulations in order to assure a share of the radio spectrum is set aside for community broadcasting.

Dead Sea, February 24th 2014