

STAKEHOLDERS REJECT THE DRAFT FREEDOM OF INFORMATION BILL

During a one day encounter of journalists and media practitioners organized by the Media Council of Tanzania (MCT) in collaboration with the Media Institute of Southern Africa-Tanzania Chapter (MISA-TAN), at Dar es Salaam on December 13th 2006, stakeholders resolved to refuse the Draft Freedom of Information Bill, 2006.

The resolution was reached after two presentations one from a University Lecturer, Dr. Sengondo Mvungi and another one by Advocacy/Broadcasting Officer of MISA-Tanzania Chapter, Mr. Mohammed Tibanyendera analysing the draft bill. Both presenters made thorough analysis of the bill and pointed out a number of mischiefs contained in it.

The Bill is drafted in difficult and complicated language for a normal lay person to understand. Its provisions restrict more information than what is guaranteed for public access. Such restrictions extend to decisions and deliberations of the Cabinet including policy formulation process.

Besides, the Bill establishes the Media Standards Board with many functions whose impact to implementation is making an independent Media Council of Tanzania redundant. It further establishes the Privacy Commissioner who, in turn, is toothless as he cannot make any binding order. What the commissioner can do is to write a report and submit the same to the public authority investigated.

Serious impacts of the Bill to broadcasters and Newspaper publishers are a requirement for accreditation and execution of a cash bond prior to publication.

The draft bill is intended to be a basket carrying everything related to media, defamation, sedition, Freedom of Information and media regulation. It proposes certain amendments to the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania, 1977, repeal of the Newspapers Act, 1976 and the Broadcasting Services Act, 1993. It also aims to amend the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority, 2003 by altering the functions of the Authority and the National Security Act, 1970.

Stakeholders refused the draft bill and asked the Media Council of Tanzania, MISA-Tanzania, and the Tanzania Media Women's Association to prepare a different draft and submit the same to government for adoption. The process of drafting an alternative bill should be complete by February 2007 since the same is expected to be tabled before the National Assembly during its April 2007 session.

End.

**Source: MISA-Tanzania Chapter
14th December, 2006**