



PRESS RELEASE

Campaign for Free Expression and Partners to Host Landmark Summit on Freedom of Expression Ahead of 2024 Elections in Botswana

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The Campaign for Free Expression (CFE), Botswana Editors Forum (BEF), Botswana Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (BOCONGO), United Nations (UN) in Botswana, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), and the Department of Media Studies at the University of Botswana (UB) proudly announce the Botswana Freedom of Expression Pre-Elections Summit, set to take place on 24-25 June in Gaborone. Themed “Strengthening Freedom of Expression and Access to Information to Enhance Electoral Integrity,” the summit is a collaborative partnership between the six organisations.

While Botswana’s commitment to democratic governance and freedom of expression has been notable since its independence in 1966, challenges persist that could impact electoral fairness and transparency, such as unequal media access for political parties and limited independence in the media. This summit, emerging from a Media Defence Seminar and a Consultative Dinner Meeting held with civil society organisations last year, aims to provide a comprehensive platform for discussing and addressing these critical issues.

Human rights experts, political parties, journalists, policymakers, academics and civil society organizations will gather at the summit to analyse the intersection of freedom of expression, access to information and electoral integrity in the lead-up to the general elections. Experts will examine the current environment to identify gaps and opportunities in the exercise of the right to freedom of expression and access to information during elections – not only for political parties and journalists, but for the general public. The summit will encourage respect for diverse opinions among all electoral stakeholders, promoting tolerance and inclusivity, and supporting the important role that independent journalism will play in the election.

Mr. Zia Choudhury, UN Botswana’s Resident Coordinator, will deliver the Keynote Address highlighting the importance of freedom of expression and access to information in elections and democracy. The summit will feature presentations on international human rights law and the African Commission's Guidelines on Access to Information and Elections, parallel sessions for media and civil society actors where each will discuss issues pertinent to their sector and come up with viable action plans to safeguard electoral integrity in Botswana, and finally a Summit Declaration by all present, affirming their commitment to defending freedom of expression during elections will be adopted and signed.

Other key speakers at the summit include Mrs Emang Mutapati, the Secretary General of the Africa Editors Forum, Chairperson of the Botswana Editors’ Forum and Editor-in-Chief of The Voice Newspaper in Botswana; Hansjörg (Hajo) Lanz, Director of Fesmedia Africa; Mrs Kagiso Molatlhwa, BOCONGO’s Executive Director; Dr Augustine Magolowondo, Chief of Party at Democracy Works Foundation; Professor Tachilisa Balule, Acting Dean of the Social Sciences Department at the University of Botswana; Dr Allen Munoriyarwa, Senior

Lecturer in Media Studies at the University of Botswana; and Anton Harber, CFE's Executive Director.

ABOUT THE ORGANISERS:

Campaign for Free Expression

The Campaign for Free Expression is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and expanding the right to free expression across Southern Africa. With offices in Johannesburg and a presence in Botswana, Eswatini, Malawi, and Zimbabwe, CFE supports individuals and organizations in exercising their right to free expression through advocacy, research, and litigation.

Botswana Editors Forum

Botswana Editors Forum (BEF) is a non-profit organization that exists to protect, defend, nurture and deepen media freedom as a democratic value in Botswana. BEF, whose members are editors, senior editorial executives and journalism trainers also exists to promote quality and ethical journalism in newsrooms across the country. As an affiliate of The African Editors Forum, BEF's mandate includes fostering solidarity among all journalists and media practitioners in Botswana and to promote cooperation in all matters of common concern between print and electronic media.

Botswana Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (BOCONGO)

BOCONGO is the national umbrella body for civil society organisations established in 1995 to coordinate the work of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Botswana. BOCONGO facilitates engagement with the government and development partners on all matters of national interest. It has over the years cemented its position as the platform through which Botswana's Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) engage in development processes, e.g., development planning, policy formulation, building stakeholder capacity, policy advocacy, engagement in joint projects and resource mobilization. BOCONGO pursues its mandate through knowledge and experience sharing with NGOs, networking, capacity building, information dissemination and policy advocacy. BOCONGO members work across six main thematic areas, namely: democratic governance, inclusive social policy, sustainable environment and resource management, gender and human rights, economic justice, arts and creative industry.

United Nations in Botswana

The UN has been supporting Botswana to achieve its national priorities, which respond to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The UN System in Botswana is made up of UN affiliated programmes, funds, specialized agencies and other entities working in the country. At present it consists of 23 members. The aim of the UN system in Botswana is to assist the country in implementing development reforms and provide support in the achievement of internationally agreed SDGs through the UN Cooperation Framework. In line with the fundamental commitment of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind, all Cooperation Frameworks will define tangible development actions reaching everyone, especially those who

are most marginalized and vulnerable. They may include women, youth, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities and others. More than ever before, UN entities will look beyond national averages and systematically strive to diminish inequalities.

Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) signed an agreement with the Government of Botswana in April 1974, manifesting strong ties with state institutions, civil organisations, trade unions and academic bodies. Our main objectives are the support of major institutional and political reforms that would foster the democratic stability in Botswana, promote the involvement of Non-State-Actors in shaping policy and democracy and strengthen civic participation in political decision-making processes. These processes aid in creating an environment for a comprehensive and expanded political and social public sphere. FES is a cooperation partner; Activities are jointly planned and carried out in close coordination with our local partners. Instruments include national, regional, and international workshops and conferences, educational and dialogue measures, studies and publications, as well as international exchange programmes.

University of Botswana, Department of Media Studies

The Department of Media Studies at the University of Botswana is the biggest and most comprehensive media training department in Botswana. We train journalism, media, and film studies graduates from Botswana and other African countries.

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