

# Charter on African Media and the Digital Divide

We the participants of the [6th annual Highway Africa conference](#) representing many of the continent's print and electronic media, journalism trainers, media researchers, media-focused NGOs and international colleagues, meeting in Johannesburg on 21-23 August 2002:

Cognisant of the growing digital divides between the developed and developing countries as well as within countries themselves along political, economic, geographic, gender, race and class lines;

Aware of the moves to strengthen and link good governance and socio-economic development in Africa through the African Union and NEPAD;

Recognising that access to the Internet and other forms of new media can empower African media to play a more meaningful role in promoting democracy, and in explicating and contextualising crucial issues of poverty, the environment and sustainable development;

Reflecting on the crucial role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in political, economic, social and cultural development in the age of globalisation and the information society, and on the need for Africa to participate fully in creating an equitable global information society;

Noting that freedom of expression is a two way process that includes the right to communicate and access to the means of communication;

Considering the various initiatives of the international community to assist in the development of the Internet in Africa, but

Noting that economic, political and legislative constraints still hinder the use of information technologies in Africa and that Africa has largely been marginalized from the telecommunication revolution;

Recalling the series of African documents addressing the need for African media to embrace and harness ICTs, including:

- The 1997 Dakar Declaration on the Internet and African media;
- The 2001 Yaoundé Declaration in which African ministers responsible for telecommunications adopted a joint strategy for bridging the digital divide that separates rural from urban areas;
- The 2001 African Charter on Broadcasting which called, inter alia, for the promotion of universal access and accelerated ICT training for journalists;
- The 2001 NEPAD Lusaka Declaration which called, inter alia, for the effective participation of African countries in global ICT policy-making;
- The 2002 media forum of the Bamako Conference which addressed, inter alia, the role of the media in the development of the information society; and
- The 2002 Accra Declaration of the Conference on Africa and the Development Challenges of the 21st Century, which expressed, inter alia, concern about the widely varying pace of democratisation in different parts of Africa, particularly concerning opportunities for citizen participation and expression;

**Accordingly declare that:**

**ICTs can help to link Africa internally and globally and are a critical component in addressing Africa's problems. Africa's media are central to these processes...**