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## STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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As the world prepares to commemorate World Press Freedom Day 2017, the global outlook remains a depressing one. Much more needs to be done to consolidate freedom of the media in many parts of the world, because without it, free expression is compromised too.

The celebration of May 3 each year as World Press Freedom Day was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 1993. This came in response to a call by African journalists who gathered in the Namibian capital of Windhoek in 1991 to craft the historic Windhoek Declaration on a Free, Independent and Pluralistic Media.

This year Unesco will host the main World Press Freedom Day 2017 celebrations in Jakarta, Indonesia, under the theme of ‘Critical Minds for Critical Times: Media’s Role in Advancing Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies’.

The 2017 World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters without Borders (RSF) has warned that “we have reached the age of post-truth, propaganda and suppression of freedoms – especially in democracies” and further indicates “a world in which attacks on the media have become commonplace and strongmen are on the rise”.

Although Namibia still remains first in Africa, according to RSF, with an improved score, it has nevertheless slipped down in the rankings by several places, from 17 in 2016 to 24<sup>th</sup> position this year. It is cause for concern that other countries are overtaking us.

This is due, among others, to brief detention of two visiting international journalists and confiscating of equipment, ongoing threats to regulate the media, a Cabinet memorandum to direct government advertising and information primarily to state-owned media, as well as problems of access to information.

It is, nevertheless, encouraging to note that President Hage Geingob has distanced himself from attempts at coercion and committed to making government more accessible through an open and transparent regime.

He has also pledged through the Harambee Prosperity Plan to work to retain Namibia’s position as the country with the freest press in Africa.

We urge him to continue on this path even in the face of disturbing rhetoric on the part of some senior members of the ruling party to curb media and to curtail online free speech through regulation of social media.

Threats to digital freedoms have been manifest in several African in the past year via the disturbing phenomenon of internet shutdowns which serve only to deprive people of their right to freedom of expression. Journalist safety on the continent remains a major concern; as is the fact that several governments are looking for new ways to stifle independent media, among others through withholding advertising.

It is pleasing to note, from the side of Namibian media itself, represented through the Editors Forum of Namibia (EFN) that serious attempts are being made to strengthen regulation in new and innovative ways, as well as to enhance journalistic professionalism through the revamp and consolidation of the EFN statutes, including the Code of Ethics and Conduct for Namibia Print, Broadcast and Online media.

Although membership of the EFN is voluntary, we call on all media to join up and commit themselves to adherence to the code of ethics and conduct in order to maintain high standards in Namibian journalism on all platforms.

The NMT is pleased to have been able to support the process which led to the adoption of the revised Code of Ethics and Conduct which will be launched at the local commemoration of World Press Freedom Day on May 10 in Windhoek.

We would urge the Namibian government in the year ahead to, among others, ensure the passage of a good Access To Information (ATI) law through Parliament by September 28, the International Day of Universal Access to Information; resist any and all attempts to curb free media and free speech in form; drop the advertising directive and to commit to ensuring an enabling environment for the exercise of these fundamental freedoms to thrive and prosper.

This would result in Namibia improving its score in the RSF rankings for 2018.

Issued by: The Namibian Media Trust (NMT) on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day 2017

**Follow the discussion on #WPF2017 and #pressfreedom on Twitter.**

Ms. Gwen Lister  
*Executive Chairperson*

#### **ABOUT THE NAMIBIA MEDIA TRUST**

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*The Namibia Media Trust works to promote media freedom, freedom of expression and access to information for the benefit of all. It is established as a Trust under Namibian law. Activities of the Trust include advocacy and policy interventions to promote media freedom, free expression and access to information in Namibia and beyond.*

#### ***Enquiries:***

Namibia Media Trust (NMT)  
15 Adler Street,  
P O Box 20783  
Windhoek, Namibia  
Tel: +264 61 279603  
Fax: +264 61 304605  
Email: [info@nmt.org.na](mailto:info@nmt.org.na)  
Facebook: [@NamibiaMediaTrust](https://www.facebook.com/NamibiaMediaTrust)  
Twitter: [@NamMediaTrust](https://twitter.com/NamMediaTrust)  
[www.nmt.org.na](http://www.nmt.org.na)