

January 29, 2026

**STATEMENT ON ONLINE ATTACKS AND THREATS AGAINST
JOURNALIST TRACY TAFIRENYIKA**

When Power Targets a Journalist, Safety Must Come First

WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA: The NMT Media Foundation expresses grave concern over sustained online attacks, threats, and xenophobic abuse directed at journalist Tracy Tafirenyika, a reporter with *The Namibian* newspaper, following her recent public interest reporting and remarks by Minister James Sankwasa.

The reporting focused on public accountability by a public official. Rather than engaging the substance or accuracy of the reporting through facts or lawful processes, the response has shifted toward personal attacks against the journalist. We have spoken directly with her, and she has expressed fear for her personal safety and that of her family. The scale and tone of the attacks have created an intimidating environment no journalist should face for doing lawful work.

The abuse does not challenge the content of the reporting. It reflects a coordinated smear campaign which questions her right to live and work in Namibia, attacks her identity, and mobilises hostility against her as an individual. Nationality and belonging are being weaponised to discredit journalism and divert attention from the issues raised. This is not the first time she has faced such harassment. Online abuse often moves offline and becomes real physical threats. This risk must be taken seriously.

NMT Media Foundation is particularly concerned because women journalists face heightened and gendered forms of attack. Sexualised abuse, threats, and intimidation are used to silence, isolate, and exhaust women journalists, driving self-censorship and withdrawal from public debate.

Journalism serves the public interest. Reporting on public officials, their conduct, and accountability in the use of public services is legitimate and protected work. Disagreements with reporting should be addressed through facts, right of reply, or lawful avenues. Personal attacks, xenophobic framing, and gendered intimidation undermine media freedom and place journalists at risk.

Namibia holds obligations under its Constitution, the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists, and regional standards. In 2022, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights adopted Resolution 522 on the Protection of Women Against Digital Violence in Africa, calling on states to combat digital violence, expand protections against gender-based harm, and safeguard women journalists through concrete measures.

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These commitments require enforcement. We call on Minister Sankwasa, who has sworn an oath to uphold and defend the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Namibia, to refrain from personalising criticism of journalists, to affirm respect for media freedom, and to address any dispute with reporting through factual and lawful means, including recourse to the Office of the Media Ombudsman.

We also call on Namibian newsrooms to strengthen safety protocols to protect journalists, particularly women who are disproportionately targeted.

When journalists are silenced through fear, society loses access to information and democratic accountability is weakened. Protecting journalist safety is a public duty.

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