

## NCC-ACRAN INTERNATIONAL FORUM

**Theme: “the challenge of social media regulation: modalities of collaboration between African media regulators and digital platforms”.**

*Yaounde, 8 and 9 November 2023*

### **Welcome speech by the President of the National Communication Council**

- The Prime Minister Head of Government, Personal representative of His Excellency the President of the Republic;
- The Minister of Communication;
- Members of Government;
- The President of the Haute Autorité de la Communication et de l’Audiovisuel of Morocco and Current President of ACRAN;
- Fellow Presidents of the Member Authorities of ACRAN and REFRAM;
- Heads of diplomatic missions and International Organisations;
- Representatives of digital platforms;
- Special guests;
- The Managing directors of print, audiovisual, and online media;
- Fellow experts;
- Distinguished guests;
- Ladies and gentlemen,

Permit me to start by wishing you a warm welcome and a wonderful time in Cameroon on the occasion of this International Forum on **“the challenge of social media regulation: modalities of collaboration between African media regulators and digital platforms.”**

Please, join me to earnestly appreciate Cameroonian authorities and, more especially, the President of the Republic, His Excellency Paul BIYA, who was so generous in granting his aegis to our initiative. Our gratitude also extends to His Excellency the Prime Minister, Head of Government, for his assistance in the organisation of this meeting.

Thank you to all Presidents of the member authorities of ACRAN and REFRAM, present here, in spite of your tight schedules. I also want to sincerely appreciate our experts, some of whom have come all the way from Europe and the United States of America.

### **Ladies and gentlemen;**

Today, regulating traditional media is no longer a mystery. Once the regulator knows their geographical location, managing director, and broadcast frequency, he can decide to take and implement adequate measures when offenses have been noticed.

On the contrary, given the liberalization and increase in hertzian waves following the digital switchover, the combination of this change with the convergence of technologies phenomenon, the communication sector has experienced a significant transformation. Social media, which are used through digital platforms, have transformed the mass communication space completely, removing it from any ethical control.

From now on, everyone can, from anywhere, where digital signals are available create and consume audiovisual content. Everyone can share varied content with harmful consequences on the public audiovisual space.

This liberalization, which is likely to undermine public order, in states, communities, and among persons, accounts for the new challenge of social media regulation faced by media regulators.

### **STATE OF AFFAIRS**

Truth be told, the virtual, fluid, and elusive nature of social media complicates the efforts of regulators to monitor them.

Digital platforms use mobile devices as their medium of expression! This free expression occurs with no editorial control and, therefore, encourages unlawful content, particularly, the promotion of paedophilia, violence, drug abuse or any other deviant content.

Faced with this situation, it is imperative that States come to an agreement with a view to find common regulatory strategies. However, to achieve this, one must come to terms with the fact that, the solution to the issue

of the impact of social media on the functioning of the global society, deals with a common problem that can only be achieved through a common strategy.

## **SOLUTIONS**

Social media are conveyed by digital platforms which are multinational companies with economic interests. Their stock-in-trade basically depends on advertisement. Owing to that, their objective is to enlist all the subscribers they can get across to, on a wider surface area of the world.

In addition, by virtue of their cross-cutting activities, digital platforms, are not often bound by the laws of the States in which they propagate the content created by their subscribers, given that their headquarters are not usually located there.

This raises the question of how to get them to comply with the ethical and moral principles of communication in these States.

This requirement can only be met through a common approach based on the population factor.

Using this factor as a leverage when facing the business aspirations of digital platforms, States can compel them to take into consideration moral and ethical requirements in the management of their content.

However, for data to be relevant, this strategy cannot be implemented separately. For example, Nigeria has a population of over 225 million. Côte d'Ivoire has a population of over 28 million. Taken separately, this data can hardly influence the business strategy of digital platforms which is based on large masses. In other words, digital platforms can relatively do without these States, and without their profits being greatly compromised.

The same goes for Central Africa. Cameroon has a population of about 28 million inhabitants. The Democratic Republic of Congo has a population of about 96 million. Such data, taken separately, is not sufficient enough to impact the business strategy of digital platforms at sub-regional level.

However, from a sub-regional perspective, it can be seen that the States of West Africa put together have a population of close to 445 million

people. In the same vein, Central African States have a total population of about 165 million. Collectively, these are strategic factors that make up a major "market" that no multinational can afford to ignore. If we compare these figures with those of the European Union, which has a population of 450 million people, the question of numbers becomes crucial.

From a methodological perspective, this approach can be implemented in three main steps:

First, the sub-regional States together (WAEMU, CEMAC) can adopt regulations based on a common code of ethics, governed by the principle that what is illegal offline should be illegal online.

Second, these community regulations may be subject to ratification by Member States and,

Third, following the ratification of these international agreements, they can be adopted at a national level in the form of legal provisions.

Only an overall strategy based on large masses and the harmonization of laws can make a difference by transforming the sub-region into a "large market". This can compel digital platforms to collaborate with States on a co-regulatory approach of audiovisual content; thus reconciling in the process the economic interests of these platforms with the moral and ethical requirements of States.

Considering all of the above, it is essential to undertake a joint reflection on this new phenomenon which is 'social media', and the plausible consequences of its use at national, sub-regional or regional levels.

It is this consideration that attests to the relevance of the theme "the challenge of social media regulation: modalities of collaboration between African media regulators and digital platforms."

I wish you a rewarding working session and hope that this meeting will provide recommendations that will contribute to the application of a more efficient and effective regulation.