



MEDIA STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AOMA SOUTHERN AFRICA REGION EXPRESS WORRY OVER THE THREATS TO INDEPENDENCE OF THE OMBUDSMAN INSTITUTION IN AFRICA

Gaborone, Wednesday, August 7, 2019 - Regional leaders of the African Ombudsman and Mediators Association (AOMA) in Southern Africa have expressed concern over the difficult working conditions experienced in recent times by some Ombudsman and similar institutions in the region. The leaders reflected on the operational challenges faced by such institutions during their three-day meeting here this week under the theme "Re-energising the Ombudsman Institution in Southern Africa".

The leaders reiterated the independence of the Ombudsman institution and asserted the OR Tambo Minimum Standards for Effective Ombudsman Institution and Cooperation, which AOMA adopted in Kempton Park, South Africa at the first African Ombudsman Summit in 2014.

The Minimum Standards call for the independence, autonomy, conditions of service and security of tenure for heads of such institutions to be safeguarded in the interests of public sector accountability. They also provide that Ombudsman and similar institutions should be sufficiently resourced in order to enhance their effectiveness.

The guarantees of independence in this regard mean that the Ombudsman or similar institutions must not be subjected to any interference and intimidation, and must not be starved of resources. Such institutions must also not work under conditions that interfere with their ability to exercise their powers and functions without fear, favour or prejudice in terms of their constitutional or statutory mandates.

The recent developments in the region, which were discussed during the meeting, have been cited with extreme concern as examples of instances in which the independence of the Ombudsman and similar institutions has been threatened.

While accepting that such institutions exercise public power, are not above scrutiny and must be held to account, regional leaders took a dim view of the threats to the independence of Ombudsman institutions in the region as it could severely undermine the functioning of these institutions.

The regional leaders further noted that such institutions play a critical role in holding governments to account, with a view to promoting and entrenching good governance, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

The regional meeting, in its resolution, will recommend to the AOMA Executive Committee to partner with the African Union (AU), Southern African Development Community and individual states to promote the independence of the Ombudsman institution and to desist from practices which undermine the independence and effectiveness of such institutions.

Article 15 of 2011 of the AU's African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance provides for the establishment, support for and effectiveness of Ombudsman and similar institutions, which support democracy, the rule of law, good governance and constitutionalism.

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Issued by the African Ombudsman and Mediators Association



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