**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**MEDIA STATEMENT: MDDA HONOURS COMMUNITY RADIO ON WORLD RADIO DAY**

**Johannesburg, South Africa, 13 February 2018.** With 13 February 2018 marking the seventh anniversary of UNESCO’s World Radio Day, the Media Development & Diversity Agency (MDDA) acknowledges and honours the important role that South Africa’s community radio sector plays in shaping a robust and sustainable democratic society.

From the early days of Cape Town’s Bush Radio, Africa’s oldest community radio station project, to today’s broadcasting landscape which boasts more than 200 stations across the country’s nine provinces, community radio has provided communities with an indispensable platform from which to raise awareness of their grass roots issues, irrespective of race, gender, disability or economic class.

Still a relatively youthful sector, community radio can trace its origins back to Bush Radio, the idea for which started in the 1980’s when community activists and alternative media producers explored ways in which media could be used for social upliftment. The radio was officially formed in 1992, broadcasting illegally following numerous attempts to apply for a broadcast license from the apartheid government.

It was however only after the first democratic elections of 1994 that South Africa saw the liberalisation of the airwaves with the establishment of an independent regulator, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), now the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA). In subsequent years some 275 community radio stations have been licenced.

In 2002, the MDDA Act (Act no 14 of 2002) was promulgated giving further, significant impetus to the transformation of the media. A public-private partnership, the MDDA’s mandate is to promote media development and diversity by providing the most disadvantaged, those traditionally sidelined by the mainsteam media, with access to information in the language of their communities.

“Listenership figures bear testimony to the impact of these interventions,” notes MDDA Acting Board Chairperson, Musa Sishange. “Published figures indicate that listenership of community radio as compared against total radio audience has moved from 8% in 1997 to, some 20 years later, 28% of the total radio listenership and a national listenership of 9 million out of the total radio audience of approximately 33 million.

“Even more encouragingly is the community radio sector’s contribution to the promotion of indigenous languages and cultural groups. Today, across the more than 150 community broadcast projects that have received funding from the MDDA, the full spectrum of South African languages can be heard.

“World Radio Day is an ideal opportunity to congratulate the community radio sector on the significant strides they have made and on their invaluable contribution to the building and reconstruction of the social fabric of our communities.”

The MDDA is a statutory development agency, deriving its mandate, from Section 16 and 32 of the Constitution Act No. 108 of 1996, thereby providing for freedom of expression and access to information. As a partnership between the South African Government and major print and broadcasting companies, it promotes and assists in the development of community media and small commercial media in South Africa and the transformation of the media, by providing support (financial, capacity building, etc.) in terms of the MDDA Act No 14 of 2002. It also aims to raise public awareness with regard to media development and diversity issues, and to encourage media literacy and a culture of reading. For further information: [www.mdda.org.za](http://www.mdda.org.za)

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