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ECOSOCC to build capacity of African media in covering the COVID-19 pandemic

The Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) of the African Union has assured African media of its support towards enhancing their capacity in covering the COVID-19 pandemic and other health crises.

ECOSOCC Head of Secretariat, William Carew said this yesterday during the *ECOSOCC Global Dialogue Series Webinar themed: Covering the Pandemic – African Journalism in the Era of COVID-19*, organized in collaboration with the International Press Institute (IPI) and attracted editors, journalists and media houses from across Africa.

The webinar created awareness about the challenges that African media organizations and journalists are facing in covering the COVID-19 pandemic on the continent and created a platform to mobilize support for knowledge exchange between journalists from across the globe to build the capacity of African journalists to report about the pandemic that has crippled the economies of many countries and overwhelmed health systems.

“This dialogue today is just the beginning of the launch of a capacity-building program in partnership with the International Press Institute,” said Mr. Carew. “ECOSOCC has been a major player in leading the sensitization and awareness raising campaigns working with other like-minded institutions in partnership with the AU CDC in sharing credible and authoritative information to African citizens. We want to work with you as part of our mandate in achieving this, particularly as Article 4 of the ECOSOCC statute makes provision for Media Organisations to be a member of the Organ.”

Opening the webinar, Dr.Lul Riek, AU’s Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Regional Coordinator for Southern Africa, Regional Coordinating Centre (SA-RCC) said the webinar series was pertinent because the accuracy and effectiveness of messages journalists provide could make informed decisions between life and death of the people who have access to it.

“Information from both reliable and questionable sources do not present different spreading patterns, thus negative information strongly influences people’s behavior, and may spread faster and wider than fact-based news,” he said. “The Africa CDC is

committed to disseminating verified and valuable COVID-19 information, and sharing knowledge with African Countries.”

Dr. Riek also gave the latest update on COVID-19 in Africa, stating that currently, over 6 million Africans have been infected, of which an estimated 154, 000 have died while 19 AU Member States are experiencing aggressive 3rd waves and one Member State is already experiencing the 4th wave of the pandemic. Further, only 1.5% of the eligible population in Africa are fully vaccinated which is far below the 60% target.

Mrs. Wynne Musabayana, Head of Communication at the African Union Commission, and lead of the Union’s communication on the COVID-19 pandemic gave a presentation on the role of the media in fighting the pandemic and the various ways in which they can get accurate information from sources including the AUC and Africa CDC.

The webinar was moderated by John Yearwood, Global News Editor, Politico (USA) and IPI Executive Board Member and panellists included seasoned media personnel from across the continent including; Mr. Dapo Olorunyomi, Publisher, Premium Times, Nigeria; Ms. Faseka Tadesse, Bloomberg, former editor-in-chief, Addis Fortune; Mr. Erik Charas, Founder of @Verdade, Mozambique; Ms. Diane Uwimana, former Head of the English Desk, Iwacu, Burundi and Ms. Khadija Patel, IPI Executive Board Vice Chair and former Editor-in-Chief of Mail and Guardian, South Africa.

The panellists shared country experiences in covering and reporting the COVID-19 pandemic including challenges they face.

ECOSOCC will, going forward in collaboration with IPI embark on capacity building training sessions for African media on covering and reporting health crises.

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About ECOSOCC

The Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) was established in July 2004 as an Advisory Organ composed of different social and professional groups of AU Member States. The mandate of ECOSOCC is to contribute, through advice, to the effective translation of the objectives, principles and policies of the African Union into concrete programmes, as well as the evaluation of these programmes.

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