
Foreword

I am pleased to introduce a timely publication about two things that are central to the Commonwealth's vision of democratic society: good elections and good media.

Elections are the fulcrum of democracy. They are the most obvious manifestation of the fact that citizens can have a say in how they are governed, and that they can exercise a sacred right by casting a vote.

The media, meanwhile, holds up a mirror to society. It informs, it educates, it entertains. A free, lively and responsible media is a prerequisite for a functioning democracy, as much at election times as in between.

Good elections and good media are not things apart: they are intertwined. Manoah Esipisu and Isaac E Khaguli have skilfully brought the two strands together, with the simple and powerful thesis that the media can and should have a major and a responsible role in bringing about the success of an election.

The Commonwealth has long been engaged in the fields of both elections and the media. We observe elections, and where we have to be critical, we are so. Yet in the spirit of an organisation that seeks to build up its members, we then commit to making electoral systems work better, for instance through the better functioning of electoral commissions and voter registration systems.

Similarly, we support the media, and have run training courses across five continents in best journalistic ethics and practice. A successful feature of recent years has been our media training workshops in the margins of ministerial meetings, designed to strengthen the role that journalists and broadcasters can play in informing citizens about the development challenges which their own societies face.

In the last decade, the Commonwealth has gone further and combined the two fields, by including journalists in its election observer groups and by analysing the role of the media in those elections.

Some of these findings are presented in this book, including the ones in which our comments were controversial: we have been forthright but objective when we have reported on editorial bias, and on the imbalances we found in the financing and content of advertising. We will continue to ensure that our opinions

on the role of the media in election processes are heard.

The media may take an election by surprise, but an election should never surprise the media. Its task is to be informed, to be prepared, to be investigative and to be ready and willing to look beyond headlines and into the meat of articles and interviews which probe the issues of democracy – fully and fairly. Electorates – and elections – depend on it. In this respect, the media is the guardian of democracy.

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Commonwealth Secretary-General
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