

# **REPORT ON THE LAUNCH OF THE AFRICAN OMBUDSMAN RESOURCE CENTRE**

## **BACKGROUND**

The resolution to establish the African Ombudsman Resource Centre (AORC) at a South African University, was taken by the First General Assembly of the African Ombudsman and Mediators Association (AOMA) in April 2005. It was envisaged that the Centre will serve as a focal point for Ombudsman offices in Africa, coordinate their activities and supporting them with the provision of the “*ICTAR Objectives*” of Information, Coordination, Training, Advocacy and Research. Information gained from the research will be made available to members and they will be supported in providing advocacy of good governance in Africa. A training programme and training courses will be established to meet the needs of the AOMA members.

The AORC is registered as a Section 21 Company according to South African Company Law and the Centre being administered by a Board of Directors comprising of Adv Madonsela (Chairperson), Dr Tjipilica (AOMA Representative), Mr Mthethwa (SA Public Protector Representative), Prof Palmer (UKZN Representative) and the Ombudsman of Burkina Faso and Sierra Leone.

## **LAUNCHING OF THE AFRICAN OMBUDSMAN RESOURCE CENTRE (OARC)**

Thanks to the dedication and hard work of the Executive of AOMA, the launching date finally arrived. The launch of the Centre took place on 15 March 2011 at the Howard College Campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), where 23 African Ombudsman Institutions were represented. The occasion was further graced by the President of the Republic of South Africa, His Excellency Mr Jacob Zuma who also delivered the Keynote Address, the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Mr Jeff Radebe, KwaZulu-Natal Premier, Dr Zweli Mkhize, the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, Mr Dieter W Haller, the Vice Chancellor of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Prof Malegapuru W Makgoba and the Major of eThekweni Municipality, Councillor O Mlaba, all of whom also delivered messages. The Public Protector of South

Africa, Adv. Thuli Modonsela gave the background of AORC and the President of AOMA and Ombudsman of Angola, Dr Paulo Tjipilica delivered the closing remarks.

I wish to highlight the following from the keynote address of President Zuma. He said:

***“I take pleasure in welcoming heads of Africa Ombudsperson institutions to our country... Our history of struggle led us to ensure that our Constitution contains a unique Bill of Rights which entrenches and promotes socio-economic rights. The role of these institutions (Ombudspersons) is to serve as an avenue through which citizens exercise their rights and hold their governments accountable. It is through holding the powerful accountable and assisting the powerless that offices of Ombudspersons will gain support from ordinary citizens. Serving as a focal point for Ombudsperson institutions across the African continent the centre we are launching today will be a source of important information. Most importantly, the role of the centre will be crucial in providing training and capacity building for Ombudsperson institutions and advocating for the promotion of Ombudsperson ideals.*”**

***The simple truth of the matter is that the future of the African continent lies in building strong institutions which are democratic, accountable and responsive to the aspirations of their citizens”***

### **NEEDS ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP**

On 16&17 March 2011, AOMA convened a needs assessment workshop of the AORC which was attended by the representatives of 23 African Ombudsman institutions. The Chief Justice of South Africa, Honourable Justice Sandile Ngcobo opened the workshop with the following remarks.

***“I would like to congratulate the University of KwaZulu-Natal, my alma mater, for hosting this workshop and for giving the AORC its South African home. The Ombudsman plays a unique role in the strengthening of constitutional democracy. The value of a constitutionally-defined Public Protector or Ombudsman, is that the independent investigation of government action is an essential component of a strong constitutional democracy. The*”**

***independence of the Ombudsman, like the independence of the judiciary, is fundamental to its effectiveness. An ombudsman must also be accessible and accountable to the public. Ombudsman is, before anything else, a public protector seized with the task of strengthening constitutional democracy by investigating and reporting on the actions of the state in order to ensure good governance and accountability”.***

The recruitment of AORC staff is well underway and upon their appointments, the Centre will be fully functional. The outcomes of the needs assessment workshop will be taken into account in the operation and plans of the centre.

The Executive Committee of AOMA, especially the Public Protector of South Africa and her staff as well as the University of KwaZulu-Natal must be commended for the successful launch of the African Ombudsman Research Centre.

**ADV J R WALTERS**

**OMBUDSMAN: NAMIBIA**