

Statement from the Southern Roundtable on Freedom of Expression Passed in Juba 17th September 2006

We, the members of the Southern Round Table on Freedom of Expression and Independent Media in Sudan condemn the kidnapping and the killing of the Mohammed Taha Mohammed Ahmed the Editor of *Al Wifaq* Arabic daily on the 6th September 2006, in Khartoum Capital of Sudan.

We are saddened, by the brutal actions of the Sudanese National Security Agency that has reintroduced repressive measures including the censorship of the local media and harassment of foreign media practitioners.

We also express our deep concerns over the brutality of the Sudanese Security agencies in beating, teargassing and arresting peaceful protestors on the 30th August and 6th September at demonstrations calling for the reduction of petrol and sugar prices.

This censorship and reported attacks, including attacks on journalists carrying out their duties are a serious deterioration of the human rights situation in Khartoum and a clear violation of the Comprehensive peace Agreement (CPA) and the Interim National Constitution of Sudan.

If the Government of the National Unity respects the CPA and the Interim National Constitution that provides for freedom of the expression and association in Sudan, it has a duty to put an immediate stop to the censorship on the press and ensure that journalist and other media practitioners can go about their profession without fear of attack or intimidation.

We request the SPLM to take urgent steps to persuade the National Congress Party and other partners in the Government of National Unity to take immediate steps towards the reform of the existing laws to ensure that they meet and respect international standards

We strongly recommend that the Media shall be self-regulated to preserve its independence and strengthen its ability to play its role as a guarantor of democracy and good governance.

We stress that the current Press Council does not meet the requirements for a professional self-regulatory body. As it is currently constituted, the Council exercises quasi-legislative power that is not conducive to press freedom and recommend that the Press Council is substituted by an independent self-regulatory body representing the profession.

In this regard the Southern Roundtable on freedom of expression has resolved to assist and facilitate Southern Sudanese media institutions to develop a self-regulatory code of ethics and make recommendations on the establishment of a independent self-regulatory body to be put into place as soon as is practically possible.