

**Date: 13 December 2014**

**Countries: Mali, Mauritania, Algeria, Morocco and Libya**



After months of preparation, when the platform's team was put together, the editorial lines agreed, the name voted on and the initial host countries selected, the new web platform, Dune Voices, was launched in Casablanca on December 13. The platform, envisaged as a bridge between social and traditional media, the first of its kind in North Africa, will be furnished with video, audio and online stories produced by MDI-trained citizen journalists who live in the Sahara desert.

'In this way the authentic and autochthon voices from real people and the real Sahara will see the light of the day, something which does not happen often, neither in the countries which share the Sahara, nor outside of them', said Dominique Thierry, MDI Programme Director and Head of [www.dunevoices.info](http://www.dunevoices.info) .

‘Though media outlets of all kinds have mushroomed in the region; in the sense of ownership and professionalism, very few stories about the Sahara bring the voices of Saharans. MDI spotted the gap and with the help of its local partners and colleagues came up with an appropriate response’.



“We see media as a public good which means that apart from fairness, accuracy and balance, journalists should be practicing sensitivity and inclusiveness. This entails the inclusion of all citizens regardless of their political, social and cultural background. So, don’t talk about me, but, talk to me, or, even better, let me talk’, said Milica Pesic, MDI Executive Director at the launch of *Dune Voices: Desert Unreported News Essentials*.

The platform’s content: stories from the Sahara in Arabic and French, will be available for download, re-airing and re-publishing to media outlets across the Middle East, North Africa and Sub-Saharan, primarily, though clients from around the world are also welcomed. The content will be available via a password; service users will have different levels of access, with a fee waiver option for local media partners. A commissioning option will be possible under ‘special services’. All platform users will have free access to *Team Sahara*, which consists of local,

national, regional, and international experts on the Sahara, available for interviewing and ready to share their publications with Dune Voices users.

In his speech at the launch, Mohamed Yahia Ould Hasni from Timbuktu, a Malian town close to the borders of Algeria and Mauritania, insisted Dune Voices should try to educate people, too. 'Where I come from, only 5% of the people are educated. Lack of education brings vulnerability, which easily leads to extremism. With education comes development and with development comes the power to speak one's mind. Media is the best means to achieve this empowerment', said Ould Hasni, who, though only 28, has witnessed several armed conflicts which have taken away his father and numerous relatives and friends.

While quite a few media outlets of ethnic minorities have been set up in Morocco over the last several years, the country's mainstream media, according to Ahmed Assid, member of the Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture, 'still struggle to reflect all our diversity and all political, social and cultural mutations and transitions. Yet, our young people are not aware of our African identity which is, at least partially, the fault of media'.

Addressing the conference on behalf of the Conflict-Prevention Pool, the UK Government programme supporting Dune Voices, Hema Kotecha stressed the importance of free and responsible media in strengthening democratic processes. 'We are stuck sometimes in myths, in particular when lacking information, lucid visions, and alternative and authentic voices; which goes against the professional values of responsible journalism. I hope Dune Voices will avoid that and offer knowledge and expertise to the public'.

Complimenting MDI's idea to get citizen journalists 'filling the gaps', Professor Mohammed Allali from ISIC, the most prominent Journalism School in Morocco, said: 'The role of the media is to communicate information, not to propagate regimes as it often happens. One of the ways to bring full information in an objective and inclusive way is through networks such as MDI's Dune Voices'.

Dunevoices.info is the core element of the [Inclusive Voices for Conflict Prevention and Democracy Building in North Africa: Bringing the Voices of the Sahara into the Public Sphere](#) project.

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