

**Steve Buckley, président de l'AMARC, UK**

Mr Chair, Honourable Minister of Communication, Representative of Grand Bassam, Distinguished Guests, Colleagues and Friends.

Good morning, Bonjour, Bienvenue, Akwaba!

It is my honour and privilege to convey the good wishes of the International Board of AMARC for the success of this Fourth Pan African Conference of Community Radio Broadcasters.

We would like to thank the Minister and the Government of Côte d'Ivoire for their trust and support as well as that of our donors and partners whose generous assistance has made this gathering possible.

May I also express our sincere appreciation to the Union des radios de proximité de la Côte d'Ivoire for hosting this conference and for arranging such excellent conditions and facilities here in Grand Bassam.

And may I congratulate the Board of AMARC-Africa for their perseverance, through difficult circumstances, in carrying forward the flame of our movement for community radio in Africa.

We meet in challenging times. International goals to reduce poverty are in disarray - among the casualties of financial greed and speculation that has plunged the world into a deep recession.

While politicians fiddle in their response to global warming, developing countries - those most at risk of the consequences - are already engaged in strategies for adaptation not prevention.

And, despite the rolling back of the Bush doctrine on terrorism, human rights remain under threat, not least by the growing influence of China on this continent and elsewhere.

Community broadcasting - rooted in communities, independent of government and private interests giving voice to the people, enabling dialogue and access to information – has become a vital tool for empowerment, for claiming our rights and for building an equitable and sustainable development.

Across Africa we have witnessed the growing presence of community radio - since the first community stations started in Mali and Benin after their democratic revolutions, and in South Africa, after the end of apartheid. The emergence of community broadcasting has been intimately connected with the growth, unsteady at times, of a culture of democracy and of popular participation in political life.

There have been set backs, including here in Cote D'Ivoire, but community broadcasters have shown their resilience, courage and conviction as defenders of democracy and human rights.

Sunday the third of May, at the end of our conference week, is World Press Freedom Day, an annual occasion to witness the courage of freedom of expression defenders, to celebrate media independence and diversity. and to remember those who have given their lives in the pursuit of media freedom. We in community radio are also freedom of expression defenders, enabling the voices of the voiceless, promoting the diversity of cultures, languages and opinions, speaking out against intolerance and discrimination, exposing wrong doing and holding leaders to account.

Last week we remembered the case of Guy-Andre Kieffer, the French-Canadian journalists, abducted five years ago in this country. Those responsible have still not been held to account. I urge our friends in the Ivorian administration to stand with us for rights and justice, and against impunity.

Today, and for the next four days, we come together as community broadcasters from across the African continent as well as from many other parts of the world. The African region of AMARC has been through difficult times, but this week is a time for us to move forward. Our radio stations face many challenges but

together we are stronger than when we work alone.

AMARC is above all a movement of international solidarity to defend and promote the values of community broadcasting and to build an alternative to the old media models. For us the broadcast media are not only an instrument of the elite and powerful but also a means by which the citizens and ordinary people, women and men, can work to improve their livelihoods, to defend their rights and to participate in political life.

This week is our opportunity to articulate those values, to strategise for the future and to organise. I wish you, therefore, a creative and productive fourth Pan African Conference of Community Radio Broadcasters.

Thank you.