**Welcome Remarks by Mr. Martin Mokgware, BOCRA Chief Executive, at the consultative Breakfast Seminar on Code of Conduct for Broadcasters During Elections held on the 20th May 2019 in Gaborone at Hilton Garden Inn.**

1. Warm greetings to you all this morning. It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to this consultative seminar on Code of Conduct for Broadcasters During Elections. Once again, we are privileged that you heeded our call in these good numbers despite your busy schedules. This seminar forms the final stage of the consultation process for the review of the Elections Code. I believe this day has been greatly anticipated and I stand here proud that we have finally come to this stage.
2. Ladies and Gentlemen, BOCRA has recently completed the development of its Five-year Strategic Plan that is visionary, adaptive and responsive to the needs of the sector. As the regulatory Authority, we are committed to making sector interventions in support of the vision espoused by His Excellency the President Dr Mokgweetsi Eric Keabetswe Masisi and pronounced in all his speeches on ICTs. He re-stated the vision this past Friday in Sefhare during the World Telecommunication and Information Society Day (WTISD) that he wishes to see ICTs play a central role in the economy of Batswana.
3. As you may recall, the Code of Conduct for Elections is a matter that attracts a lot of interest, especially ahead of the National Elections. It is therefore crucial for BOCRA to engage with you stakeholders and put in place guidelines that will ensure high reporting standards and professionalism for the Broadcasting Industry on this sensitive national engagement.
4. We are gathered here today to present to you the final draft of the Code. In coming up with this revised code, we have taken into consideration the recommendations you made through oral and written submissions. Director of Ceremonies, I need not emphasise that Broadcast media is perhaps the most accessible and by extension arguably the most influential in the democratic election process. There are two very important aspects of Broadcasting in a democratic dispensation; To **inform the public** and to **act as the watchdog.** These two aspects become even more pronounced during elections. Broadcasters are charged with the responsibility of safeguarding the democratic process by facilitating access to information and public participation in national debates.  Notwithstanding its crucial role, discretion on what issues are broadcast, what angle they take, who gets invited to lead discussions etc remain, very much, the prerogative of the news media. This explains why it is important for the industry to have a common framework guiding it during this national engagement that defines the country’s destiny for the ensuing five years.
5. Director of Ceremonies, for the Broadcasters to fulfil their watchdog role, they need to maintain a high level of professionalism, accuracy and impartiality in their coverage of events. The Code strongly expresses these principles. I am aware that the Independent Electoral Commission of Botswana has a separate code of conduct for the mass media that guides coverage of elections. However, BOCRA as the supervisor of Broadcasters is charged with the mandate to put in place an enforceable code through which the conduct of licensees can be moderated.
6. During the stakeholder consultation at Travel Lodge last October, you made a set of significant proposals to the draft Code that was under consideration. One such proposal was for the Code to allow for party-political advertising. You were of the strong view that election time is opportune for targeted advertising, to boost your commercial viability and enhance visibility of contesting parties.
7. As I welcome you this morning, I am happy to announce that we have heeded your plea. We have also gone further to provide for a quota system to avoid unfairly tilting the scales towards political entities with more financial resources. We did not just stop there but have also reviewed other critical components of the Code as my team will highlight during the presentation of the Code to you in a moment.
8. We have invited other stakeholders like the Independent Electoral Commission who are key to this process and have been instrumental in guiding us. As I conclude my remarks, I invite you to feel free to, once again, objectively examine the Code and further enhance it. It is only through your inputs that we will have a Code that balances the interests of all stakeholders.
9. Director of Ceremonies let me not take much of your time and allow enough time for discussions. With those remarks, I have welcomed you all and invite you to enjoy the deliberations.

I thank you for your attention.

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