

Remarks by Aidan Eyakuze, Twaweza Executive Director, to the Opening Plenary Session of the OGP Africa Meeting, May 20th, 2015, in Dar es Salaam.

Your Excellency, President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete,

Honourable George Mkuchika, Minister of State, Good Governance,

Honourable Andrew Tehmeh, Deputy Minister of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism of Liberia,

Invited guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to Dar es Salaam in the United Republic of Tanzania. Karibuni sana! *Soyez, les bienvenues!*

It is fantastic to see so many participants here from all over the continent, for this important meeting. I can confirm that it is officially oversubscribed.

Since its inception in 2011, the Open Government Partnership has provided a platform for domestic reformers – both within and outside government – committed to making their governments more open, accountable, and responsive to citizens. Since then, OGP has grown from 8 countries to 65, including 8 on the African continent. In all of these countries, government and civil society are working together, with varying degrees of engagement, partnership and success, to develop and implement ambitious open government reforms.

The OGP is not a perfect movement or process, and it is not without its critics. For some it is a smokescreen that provides good PR for governments who have no real intention to reform. Such criticism cannot be dismissed out of hand. I will come to that point in a moment.

First, I want to highlight what I see as the key element to the OGP's success: **partnership**. It is a principle that is so deeply embedded in the OGP, it makes up one-third of its name. That is significant. Because it is as a partnership between government and civil society that the OGP will succeed, or fail.

Partnership requires effort on all sides. It requires that governments make space for meaningful dialogue on major issues of open government policy and practice. Sometimes that dialogue can be uncomfortable, especially when those outside government raise challenges. But *without* government creating space for that dialogue, the Open Government **Partnership** cannot hope to succeed.

On the part of civil society, we must accept the reality that setbacks will happen as we journey towards a changed culture of governance. Open government calls for such a fundamental change to how government operates that it cannot be a completely smooth process.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Here in Tanzania, this meeting could not be more timely – both for the goal of **open government**, and for the principle of **partnership**.

As you may be aware, the government here recently passed two bills that have attracted concerted criticism – the Statistics Act and the Cyber Crime Act. Two further bills – an Access to Information Bill and a Media Services Bill – are before parliament.

As written in the versions of the Bills presented to Parliament, certain clauses in the four bills are problematic. They challenge the freedom of conscience and expression enshrined in Article 18 of our Constitution. The clauses are inconsistent with the principles of open government. They threaten to undermine Tanzania's reputation as a leader in the field of open government.

And yet, Your Excellency, this moment also presents the perfect opportunity for the OGP, and for the Tanzanian government, to demonstrate true partnership in practice. Your government can turn this around, invite civil society to bring their ideas, and make amendments to the bills that would protect space for public engagement, debate and freedom of expression.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These are not uniquely Tanzanian challenges. Yesterday, my colleagues and I, in civil society from across the continent discussed how we can better engage with the OGP, and how the cause of open government can be moved forward.

Mr President, I would like to present to you elements of our Statement on the current challenges and opportunities for open government in Africa:

We call on the Governments of OGP participating countries to establish and ensure the implementation of laws that recognize and protect freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly, freedom of information, freedom of the press, whistle-blower protection and remove unwarranted restrictions and controls on civil society organizations including the repeal of secrecy laws.

We call on the Government of Tanzania to revisit recent legislation on Statistics, Cybercrime, Access to Information and Media Services, to ensure that space for open public debate, including room for dissenting voices, is robustly protected.

We call on the Governments of Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi and Ghana to adopt comprehensive access to information laws that would empower their citizens and help them understand government better.

We call on the Governments of South Africa, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Tunisia to fulfil the promise of their access to information laws by ensuring that they are implemented and enforced.

We call on civil society organizations and networks in African OGP participating countries to broaden, widen and deepen awareness of the OGP among citizens, and to claim their legitimate space in decision making at the national, regional and global level.

We call on civil society organizations to hold ourselves to the same standards we demand of our governments, by being open, transparent and accountable about our own activities and operations.

So, is the Open Government Partnership a smokescreen, a charade, a game of “let’s pretend”?

I do not believe so and we have the perfect opportunity over the next two days to prove this...together.

Let us demonstrate, during this African gathering that the OGP is a powerful platform for effective engagement between citizens and their governments.

Let us demonstrate today, that public commitments to open government are not just exercises in sophisticated public relations.

Let us demonstrate bold and courageous ambition. And to make it all work, let us both, government and civil society, demonstrate a deep, serious, candid, and an open **partnership**.

Thank you for your kind attention!