

**Mission Director David Gosney's Remarks at the  
2024 IGAD Media Awards Ceremony Event  
October 23rd, 2024, 4:00 PM - 8:00 PM  
Venue: Argyle Hotel-Nairobi**

Aden Dualle- Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Forestry

Dr. Workneh Gebeyuhu - IGAD Executive Secretary

Esteemed media professionals,

Other colleagues at the Intergovernmental Authority on Development,

Distinguished guests,

Good Evening.

It is a great pleasure to be here **tonight to celebrate the outstanding contributions** of local **media across the East African region** to **foster peace and dialogue**, and to **promote transparency, good governance and accountability**.

Of course tonight we are **not only gathered to recognize the incredible achievements of the committed, brilliant media professionals** among us. **We are also here to be reminded of the power of truth and storytelling**.

As the head of the United States Agency for International Development in Kenya and East Africa, we recognize — the *United States recognizes* — **the invaluable role of a free and independent media** to the **health, security and economic growth of societies across the globe**.

In the United States, **we are sincere when we call independent, public media the 4th branch of government.** Because we know that fact finding, investigative reporting, and public accountability are absolutely **vital to the functioning of a healthy, growing democracy.** And these are not just platitudes. Today, the **U.S. government is the largest public donor** to free and independent media development around the world. **At USAID across East Africa,** and in partnership with IGAD, **we support a variety of initiatives** that encourage robust social dialogue, to help push forward inclusive policy decision making and transformative development.

To give just a brief example:

Here in Kenya, over the past few years **USAID's Resilience Learning activity has invested in the skills strengthening for 250 journalists and media practitioners** in this country's **nine arid and semi-arid counties.** These training sessions are invaluable, and we've seen the power of equipping local journalists with the knowledge, resources and networks they need to document impactful development in their regions. **We've seen that armed with the skills to warn the public about coming challenges, like drought and disease, their reporting has saved lives and livelihoods.**

The incredible **Hesborn Etyang** (Hes-borne Eh-tee-yang) working **with the People Daily Newspaper** is a shining example of this partnership. **He's here with us tonight,** and he was one of those **trained and supported to report on COVID-19** interventions in **Turkana**

**County.** His story; “*Village ‘doctors’ saving young lives in Turkana amid COVID-19 pandemic*” won the **Digital Health Category award during the 2022 Annual Journalism Excellence Awards (AJEA) organized by the Media Council of Kenya.**

But the United State’s support for press corps around the globe is not just about our individual projects. Perhaps just as importantly, **we at USAID encourage local media scrutiny and transparency in our own work.**

Because **we know that it is incredibly important that people are kept informed on what we are doing and why we are doing it.** And it is vital **that we as USAID are kept accountable through the independent transparency of the press, which ensures that our development aid is working** in the way we intend.

Supplied **with this information, citizens** here in Kenya and across the region, are able to effectively **contribute to their own development,** and can **determine their own path to growth and prosperity.**

I want to thank the journalists here who have covered stories where USAID has had an impact, and I want to encourage you all: **keep asking my colleagues and I tough questions; keep pressing us on complex and difficult topics;** we are all the better for your reporting!

**To wrap up**, tonight we're celebrating not only the winners of these awards, but all those who work tirelessly to inform, educate, and empower communities across the East African region.

**The United States remains committed to strengthen the media landscape by enhancing press freedom**, and promoting responsible journalism. We will be your steadfast partner as we continue to ensure community voices are at the forefront of development storytelling.

**Together, we are working to build a future where the voices of all citizens can be heard and where transparency and integrity are the foundations of governance.** I

commend all the journalists and media organizations here this evening for their dedication and hard work. You truly inspire us all.

**Thank you again to IGAD** for hosting these wonderful awards.

Asanteni Sana.