

**11th March 2016**

Dear OSIEA regional board members,

My colleagues and I are delighted to welcome you to the board’s first meeting in 2016, to be held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, on 19th and 20th March 2016. The venue of the meeting will be the Southern Sun Hotel, right within the city center. We are particularly delighted that Dr. Magda Ali will be joining us.

The main agenda for our March 2016 meeting will be consideration and review of OSIEA’s draft strategy for 2017-2020. As we have previously briefed you, OSIEA is expected to present and discuss this new strategy with OSF’s strategy and budget committee in May this year. The draft strategy that we will present to you at this meeting is an evolving document. This board meeting comes a bit early for a final draft to be available but what is positive is that the board has the opportunity to guide and input this important process early.

The draft strategy that the board will be considering excites us for a number of reasons. First, it incorporates Rwanda, Burundi, and Somaliland into our programming. Secondly, we have taken the approach of preparing the strategy at the OSIEA-wide level rather than at country and program levels which has been the case in the past. Viewed in this way, the strategy seeks to move OSIEA away from the current siloed country program based programming to regional thematic programming. We believe that this will improve the quality and reach of OSIEA’s programming. Subject to the board’s approval of the new strategy design, we plan to realign the current country programs to thematic programs, the details of which will work out later on. Third, the draft strategy proposes to take forward much of the exciting work we are already engaged in while presenting new opportunities, for example on economic development and rights. We are presenting a new strategy in the context, internally, of a continuing budget and head count freeze. Externally, the context is one of closing civic spaces and shrinking funding for civil society.

In addition to discussing our new strategy, the board will have the opportunity to discuss policy dimensions and strategic observations on grants presented for review. These grants will have been reviewed by board members ahead of the board meeting. We have sent for review eight grants, including 2 from the Tanzania program, 4 from the Uganda program, 1 from the Sudan program and 1 from the food security program. Traditionally, the first board meeting of each year has seen fewer grants presented for review as program staff are still thinking through their priorities for the year.

There will also be a portfolio review session at this board meeting focusing on OSIEA’s programming on the recent elections in Tanzania as well as a learning session, with participation of a number of grantees, on a similar topic. We will be inviting Dr. Khoti Khamanga, a former board member and now board elder, to participate in both the portfolio review and learning session. We will also be joined by Siphosami Malunga, the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa’s (OSISA’s) executive director for this board meeting.

Finally, the board will conduct an initial review of proposed additional board members.

We wish you safe travels and again say *karibuni* (welcome).

**Mburu Gitu**

**Executive Director**