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#### Alternative news network launched

Saiful Azhar Abdullah in Kampala, Uganda

THE Smart News Network International (SNNi), an alternative news network for developing countries, was officially launched last night.

The formation of SNNi was realised after Uganda President Yoweri Museveni, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Mozambique President Joaquim Alberto Chissano, on behalf of Smart partners, subscribed to the Munyonyo-Kampala Declaration on Media on Sunday night.

The declaration reads: "Reaffirming the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular the right to freedom of opinion and expression including freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers, the participants of the Global 2001 Smart Partnership Dialogue held at Munyonyo, Kampala, Uganda, are pleased to announce the formation of Smart News Network International as a further exercise of such freedom of opinion and expression."

The launch of SNNi marks a significant step forward for the advocates of the smart partnership.

The establishment of SNNi is seen as one of the concrete achievements in the dialogue since 1995 when the first Langkawi International Dialogue was held in Langkawi.

Eleven news agencies and newspapers have participated by contributing articles to the network via its website <http://www.snni.org>.

They are Daily News of Botswana, Mozambique News Agency of Mozambique, Namibia Today of Namibia, Buanews of South Africa, New Vision of Uganda, The Herald (Zimbabwe), Seychelles Nation (Seychelles), and Bernama, New Straits Times, The Star and Utusan Malaysia (Malaysia).

Under the arrangement, participating media organisations would contribute news, features, photographs and video images to the website on a daily basis. The server of the website is located in Kuala Lumpur.

The idea of a news network was mooted in August last year in Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, during the fourth Southern Africa International Dialogue.

The leaders of participating nations felt that establishing a news network and forging close co-operation among developing countries would help their cause in fighting the Western media's biased reporting.

They had examined the issue including asking themselves why their countries relied so much on Western media like the Cable News Network and Reuters for news about their own region.