

Africa's reputation on the agenda

 By [Louise Marsland](#)

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'Managing Africa's Reputation' is the theme of the 31st annual Federation of African Public Relations Associations (FAPRA) conference, being held for the first time in South Africa. Public relations practitioners have come under fire for not doing enough to engage with business and the media to elevate Africa's profile globally.

The Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) is playing host to the All Africa PR conference at the Sandton Sun and Towers in Sandton, Gauteng, 21 - 23 May, 2006. Bizcommunity.com is an online media partner to the event.

The hostess is South Africa's first Fapra vice president (Southern Africa region), Kate Bapela, who says the event is an historic opportunity for the industry to work with one voice towards 2010 and in marrying communication objectives with business and political initiatives on the continent.

Fapra president, Joseph Allotey-Pappoe from Ghana, said the 140 or so African delegates had traveled to South Africa from Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, SA, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe for "serious business"... "the business of sharing information on how to place our professional services with regards to aiding our continent, to give greater focus to our efforts... to focus on unlocking Africa's potential".

Allotey-Pappoe emphasized: "We public relations practitioners are front runners when it comes to counseling on and handling Africa's PR. Colleagues, the time has come when Fapra must get governments and institutions together about the facts of our being (as PROs) and consultatively engage.

"The world is changing, standards are increasing. Fapra is happy we are meeting here today as South Africa has become a leader in Africa and we, as Fapra, will make the best of our time here."

'Brand Africa'

Kenyan high commissioner, T J Seii, said the despondent image of Africans that was consistently projected to the rest of the world through global media, made people think Africa is a continent of no hope.

She said the challenges involved getting the media to work with the public relations industry on the continent to tell the true African story, by Africans.

"The media are part and parcel of our environment, they are not the enemy. We need to understand it and strategically maximise for advantage. We need to constructively engage the media."

One of the mechanisms to actively harness the media in this struggle was for governments in Africa to protect press freedom as a democratic right, Seii said.

Current Prisa president, Merle O'Brien, said PR should be willing to change ahead of trends. "Is it possible that from Africa a global brand will emerge... called Ubuntu? Public relations has the ability to facilitate change... our [Africa's] role in the creative economy is not being communicated. We need to communicate the potential of Africa to the rest of the globe.

"This is a momentous opportunity for us to unite as an industry, as a country and as a continent," O'Brien said in her opening to the conference on the first day, today, Monday, 22 May 2006. Yesterday, Sunday, was a networking opportunity for the industry.

Of the 200 plus delegates at this historic conference, only about 30% are from the local, South African public relations industry. Informal comments from speakers and from the floor indicated time and time again, that the public relations industry had to mobilise to rectify its own communications shortcomings and work more closely with business to elevate Africa's image on the global stage.

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

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