



**18 October 2014**

**Hlaudi Motsoeneng  
SABC**

### **MEMORANDUM: KEEP OUR MEDIA FREE**

The SABC is the single largest mass communications medium in the country. As our public broadcaster, it is tasked with the responsibility of serving our information, educational and entertainment needs through broadcasting.

The SABC must be the home where our languages, our stories and our cultures come alive, and where we collectively discuss solutions to the many challenges we face.

Because many of us do not have access to a wide range of information sources that enable us to make informed choices, we rely on the SABC for this. The SABC must, therefore, work for us and meet our needs.

#### **An SABC that works**

We believe that public broadcasting in South Africa must strengthen the goals of our Constitution. The SABC must be a visionary public broadcaster that demonstrates a commitment to broadcasting local, quality, diverse and people-oriented programming

An SABC that works is an SABC that:

1. clearly belongs to all people(s) of SA and has not be captured for promotion of narrow political/commercial/sectarian interests
2. places an emphasis on local content that brings the people of South Africa together in dialogue on important and pressing political and social issues and advances social justice;
3. is fair, balanced and credible; and
4. leads by example in public interest broadcasting both in SA and across the continent.

#### **Visionary leadership with integrity**

Since its near collapse in 2007, the SABC has been under the spotlight for weak leadership that has been consistently marked by scandal. We believe that without credible leadership, the SABC will never come out of crisis.

We demand that:

1. the SABC Board Chairperson, Ellen Tshabalala, lay the allegations that she intentionally misrepresented herself before parliament to rest and **show us her degrees** so she can get on with her work;
2. the SABC Board implement the recommendations made by the Public Protector in her report, *When Governance and Ethics Fail*, and take appropriate action against the COO, Hlaudi Motsoeneng, for misrepresenting his qualifications irregularly and increasing his salary three times in one year];
3. the SABC Board consistently, and without fear or favour, sanction all members of staff who are discovered to have infringed SABC policies and the law. A strong message must be made that the SABC will not tolerate lying, mismanagement and corruption; and
4. the SABC Board appoint a suitably qualified, experienced *and* skilled GCEO and CFO for the SABC in an independent, fair and transparent process.

### **Credibility**

We believe that SABC programming must be based on the principles of credibility, reliability, variety and balance. We are, therefore, opposed to any proposals or practices that undermine these key principles for public broadcasting.

We demand that:

1. the SABC COO, Hlaudi Motsoeneng, retract his call for 70% “good” news and commit to 100% credible news on the SABC; and
2. the SABC ensures an environment that enables journalists and media workers to be able to have and broadcast difficult and controversial conversations without fearing for their jobs and / or engaging in self-censorship;
  - a. in particular, the SABC Board Chairperson must withdraw her statement that SABC workers can and would be spied on to “monitor and prevent leaks”, and undertake to establish a safe and unthreatening working environment for them.

### **Our stories, our voice**

We believe that the SABC should serve the public by holding up a mirror to our lives and our culture – keeping us informed and allowing us to have the difficult discussions the country needs. As our public broadcaster, the SABC should be broadcasting our stories, made by our local producers, in our languages, to amplify our voices.

We demand that the SABC:

1. do away with stale and irrelevant foreign soapies like *Days of Our Lives* and *The Bold and The Beautiful* to give way to more local documentaries, dramas and magazine shows;
  - a. in particular, we want to see *Miners Shot Down*, *Crumbs* and *Project Spear* on our screens; and
2. make a commitment to launching a Parliamentary TV channel when the digital migration project officially launches. We believe that it is wrong that access to Parliament is only possible for those who can afford to pay. As our public broadcaster, the SABC has a duty to show us what happens in those chambers of power so we can be able to hold our elected representatives accountable.
3. Reconfirm that the 24 hour news channel will be launched on free-to-air when the digital migration project officially launches. It is unconscionable that a public channel should only be available on a pay-tv service.

### **Keep Free-to-Air Free!**

The transition to digital terrestrial television (DTT) has the potential to impact the country and people's basic communications rights advantageously in a number of ways. It has the potential to ensure everyone receives a vastly increased number of TV channels, transform ownership patterns, as well as free up valuable spectrum that can ensure greater access to high-speed Internet.

We fear the prospect of television becoming divided in DTT, whereby the minority that is able to pay for subscription services gets a wider range of and better quality services while the majority who cannot afford to pay are saddled with limited and poor quality services. Should the free-to-air DTT content offering not be of high quality, nor offer substantial diversity, nor include a variety of (incentive) channels and locally produced content, then it stands to become a 'poor-person's-television' service thus further entrenching already acute communications inequalities.

Further, given that recent indications from government that each TV set will require a set-top box decoder costing R700 and with the average household in South Africa earning just over R8000 per month, R700 for a set-top box decoder is a highly prohibitive fee to pay in order to access free-to-air TV and will likely leave most households shut out from access.

We do not want that for free-to-air TV, and we do not want that for our SABC.

We, therefore, call on the SABC to:

1. tell us how many new channels offering new and local content it will broadcast when DTT officially launches;
2. tell us how much money it has invested in commissioning new content where our stories will be told in our voices; and
3. support our demand for free STBs for all out of a recognition that we, who rely on the SABC for our information, educational and entertainment needs need free-to-air TV to be kept 100% free.

The SABC must lead the fight for media freedom and freedom of expression!

We expect a written response to the issues raised here no later than 1 November 2014.

<b><u>Delivered:</u></b>	<b><u>Received:</u></b>
Signed:	Signed:
Sekoetlane Phamodi, SOS Coordinator	Name:
For the SOS & Right2Know	SABC