



# RIGHT2KNOW

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17 December 2013

Dr Iqbal Survè  
Sekunjalo

## **Memorandum regarding media freedom and your removal of the Cape Times Editor**

The Right2Know campaign expresses great disquiet at an unprecedented threat to independent journalism in South Africa.

By relieving Cape Times editor, Alide Dasnois, of her post as editor and threatening to sue her and a reporter, Melanie Gosling, you have threatened the editorial independence of the Cape Times.

You summarily removed the editor without any notice or due process after she published a news article covering the Public Protector's report into the irregular issuing of a tender to another of your companies, Sekunjalo Marine Services Consortium, by the Fisheries Department.

The reasons you gave for Dasnois being summarily removed from her editorship was the declining circulation figures and not putting the death of Nelson Mandela on the front page - an action you described as disrespectful. We note with dismay that you have changed your reasons as the controversy has deepened.

We put it to you that the circulation figures of other newspapers in the group are declining, with the Cape Times declining the least. None of the other editors was removed. Further, the Cape Times broke the story of Mandela's death on Friday, December 6. This was done in a wrap-around - which covered the front page of the newspaper - which Time magazine selected in its top 14 in the world (and the only one from Africa).

The reasons you have provided for your actions appear baseless. Even if your reasons had merit, the speed with which you implemented your decisions flouted all due process and labour law. This suggests that yours was a response to the negative publicity on your part in the tender irregularities alleged by the Public Protector rather than your desire to restructure Independent Newspapers or honour Mandela.

As such actions of Sekunjalo Holdings, the controlling shareholder of SIM, are a threat to the editorial independence of the 14 titles around the country that fall under Independent Newspapers.

The implicit threat is that any journalist writing anything the owners disagree with or dislike does so at the risk of being sued or 'redeployed'.

The biggest asset of any newspaper is its credibility and the owners should recognise the value of public trust which, in the Independent Newspapers group, is now vulnerable.

The manner in which you have responded to the controversy ensuing from your decision to remove the editor – spinning the incident as a labour relations matter rather than owning up to a lapse in your judgment - suggests that you have little respect for the public's right to know or for the editorial independence of journalists that produce your newspapers.

We call for:

1. Editorial independence: A minimum requirement for the company assuring the public of its commitment to independent journalism would be for an editorial charter to be drafted - and an editorial advisory board to be appointed - by people and institutions entirely independent of the owners of the Independent Newspapers.
2. The unconditional withdrawal of all threats to sue the Cape Times editor, Alide Dasnois, and reporter Melanie Gosling.
3. The unconditional re-instatement of Alide Dasnois as editor of the Cape Times, should she be willing to return after the treatment meted out to her. Alternatively, a suitable settlement to compensate for all her losses should be negotiated with her, including the indignities she has had to suffer.
4. The written assurance that SIM, Sekunjalo Holdings and Sekunjalo Investments and their chairman, Iqbal Survè, will never again sue, or threaten to sue any of Independent Newspapers' titles, editors and editorial staff on matters of overwhelming public interest or that involve fair comment

Nelson Mandela said: "A critical, independent and investigative press is the lifeblood of any democracy. It must have sufficient independence from vested interests to be bold and inquiring without fear or favour."

We will be maintaining a close vigilance over activities at Independent Newspapers and look forward to your written response within a week.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

For Independent Newspaper Group (INL)  
RECEIVED

For the Right2Know Campaign  
DELIVERED