

COM

Campaign for Open Media

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Chairperson: Raymond Louw
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His Excellency
Dr Mario Piersigilli
Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and
The Ambassador
Italian Embassy
796 George Avenue
Arcadia
PRETORIA 0083

By telefax: (012) 43-5547

Dear Dr Piersigilli

I am writing to you on behalf Mr Raymond Louw, the chairperson of the Campaign for Open Media (COM) and a co-chairperson of the Campaign for Independent Broadcasting (CIB). Mr Louw extends his greetings and good wishes to you.

You may recall that we wrote to you towards the end of last year to request a briefing with the diplomatic corps. We were informed then that you had no objection to the briefing, but that we would should make the necessary arrangements ourselves. Given the difficulties of arranging such an event during the Christmas/New Year festive season, we were unable to do so.

It is has now become critical for both COM and the CIB to appraise representatives of the international community of developments in South Africa pertaining to the future of broadcasting and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) in particular. COM and the CIB are playing a leading role in these developments.

The role of the South African media, and particularly the SABC, is certain to affect the outcome of elections in South Africa, and therefore the role of the SABC is crucial in any assessment of free and fair elections.

COM has systematically been monitoring TV news broadcasts on SABC since March 1992 and would like to present its findings to representatives of the international community to demonstrate the urgency of the need for substantial changes to the SABC. In short, our monitoring reports reveal that South African viewers and listeners are still subjected to significant National Party Government control of news and views.

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Affiliated organisations: Anti-Censorship Action Group, Congress of South African Writers, Conference of Independent Newspaper Editors, Film and Allied Workers' Organisation, Media Workers' Association of South Africa, South African Union of Journalists, Association of Democratic Journalists

Since a majority of South Africans are illiterate and cannot access other news and views through the print media, and because there are in our view serious problems about the lack of impartiality on the part of the SABC, this set of circumstances could have a detrimental effect on the outcome of any elections.

As you may have read in the print media, the CIB, which is largely a civil society coalition of organisations as well as some political organisations, have launched a campaign to bring about an independent board of governors for the SABC. We are negotiating a selection and appointment procedure for this board with the Ministry of Home Affairs. The ANC and the Democratic Party, both members of the CIB, are in addition also pursuing this matter in bi-lateral and multiparty negotiations with the government.

The aim is to create a board which will be independent of the control of the existing and future governments as well as the influence of political parties and organisations.

Since the term of the present board expires on March 30 this year, a new board must resume its duties on April 1, which is less than three months away. Given the urgency of this matter we would be grateful if Your Excellency could convene the diplomatic corps on our behalf for them to be fully informed of these developments and their implications for the first non-racial elections to be held in South Africa.

Our preferred date and time for such a briefing is February 2, 1993 in Cape Town from 15h00 - 17h00. Since the South African parliament will be opening in Cape Town shortly, we thought that this would be the best place because many international representatives will be in Cape Town during that time.

The Institute for Democratic Alternatives for South Africa (IDASA) has kindly offered to make its premises available for such a briefing. The address is IDASA, 5th Floor, Nerina Centre, 64 Buitenkant Street, Cape Town.

If this request finds favourable consideration with Your Excellency, we will also be contacting various UN, EC and Commonwealth observers, local violence monitoring groups, representatives of the National Peace Committee and the Goldstone Commission, as well as representatives of the ANC and Democratic Party, to attend as well.

We would be grateful for confirmation of our request as soon as possible so that we are able to facilitate arrangements within the next week with all the parties mentioned above.

Yours sincerely

J. C. Minnie

Ms Jeanette Minnie
Organiser : Campaign for Open Media
Member of the Steering Committee : Campaign for Independent
Broadcasting