

Civil Society meeting resolves to tackle SABC crisis & form coalition for independent broadcasting

The following statement was adopted at a meeting convened yesterday 10 June 2008 in Johannesburg by the Media Monitoring Project (MMP) and the Open Society Foundation (OSF). The purpose of the meeting was to develop civil society strategies to deal with the current crisis at the SABC.

Representatives from the following organisations were present: the Media Monitoring Project (MMP), the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI), the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ), the Black Film Makers Network, Wits University's Journalism and Media Studies Departments, the University of Pretoria's Law Department, the National Consumer Forum, the Southern African Litigation Centre, Sangonet, Oxfam, Bemawu, the Interpress Service, MCM Digital Media and the Afrimap project

Statement: Concerned citizens and representatives of various civil society and media organisations hereby resolve: To take the current crises at the SABC as an opportunity to recommit ourselves to the established and agreed principles of public broadcasting, which define public broadcasting as independent from interference from the government of the day, political parties as well as commercial and economic influence/interference. The main objective of public broadcasting is to serve the public and therefore we want to reclaim our public broadcaster, the SABC, for the public. To this end we aim at forming a broad coalition to campaign for the strengthening of public broadcasting comprising of a range and diversity of civil society, media groups, unions, other interested parties and members of the public to address mid and long term reform issues at the SABC. In the immediate future we resolve to undertake the following actions:

to draft urgently a position paper on salient issues on the legal and organisational structures of the SABC drawing lessons from the crises experienced;

to identify options to deal with the immediate crises affecting SABC management, SABC board and the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Communication;

to follow up on the blacklisting complaint lodged by the FXI at ICASA and ensure that ICASA fulfils its public mandate proactively to ensure compliance by the SABC of its Charter and licence conditions;

to draft recommendations on an SABC Act including ownership structure, character and appointment of the board, executive management, funding, Charter and so on; and

to call upon the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Communications to exercise its constitutionally mandated oversight role effectively;

to initiate the formation of a civil society Coalition for Public Broadcasting.

In the mid term:

to initiate a policy review process leading to a new communications policy which reinforces independent regulation and public broadcasting principles; and

to draft an SABC Act to be submitted to Parliament.

A working committee has been established, to take this process forward. Kate Skinner will coordinate the campaign in close conjunction with the FXI and MMP. Assistance will be drawn from the following organizations and individuals: Justine Limpitlaw, Jeanette Minnie, Tawana Kupe, Misa SA, BEMAWU and the National Consumer Forum.

The working committee has undertaken to approach: COSATU, MWASA, TAC, NACTU, and other interested groups and individuals.