

Press Freedom Day

As we remind ourselves of what happened on this day in 1977, let's celebrate our advancements and remind ourselves of the shortcomings and press freedom challenges.

Over the years, our country has made significant advances in the press freedom arena. We have relatively well established policy and regulatory environment and compares well with the rest of the world. Our rights to access to information, protests and gathering and freedom of expression in general are well established and we have reason to celebrate.

We should however always remind ourselves that we can do better. Our history demands from us to be alert and always ensure that these hard fought gains are protected and improved. In this regard:

Whilst we have an access to information law, it remains significantly worrying that so few access to information requests are responded to and even fewer are resolved.

Whilst we have the right to protest as a fundamental right in the constitution, marches are still banned or not allowed, protesters are harassed and killed and thus the voices of our people gets silenced.

The regulatory environment for all forms of the media remains shaky. Diversity and ownership remain the most significant challenge and it is coupled with the need to improve print media regulation.

Whilst we acknowledge the need to have state secrets, we are concerned with the current draft of the State's secrets bill. Unless significantly adjusted, it will roll back the gains of the past 20 years.

Universal access, local content and transparency issues remains at the core of the problem with public and community broadcasting.

The slow pace to review and transform the overall communications arena presents its own set of challenges, particularly with digital migration.

The world over, indications are press freedom are increasingly under threat. Journalists are being killed with impunity. Speech and association are curtailed. Secrecy has become a norm with certain countries and governments.

On this day, we should remind ourselves that banning orders, detentions and victimizations of the press can never be tolerated. Breaking from the past means celebrating what we have and improving our efforts to safe guard the gains of our democracy.