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SABC CENSORSHIP OF PROTEST VISUALS

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The FXI and FXN view the decision by the SABC not to air visuals of protests it deems violent in its news bulletins as an act of censorship. This action by the SABC effectively denies citizens access to critically important public information. Many South Africans depend on the SABC as their primary source of news. The move further represents a narrowing of editorial independence through increasing managerial interference within the public broadcaster.

On 27 May 2016, the SABC announced that it would no longer air footage of the destruction of public property during protests on its bulletins. In a statement, the SABC justified the decision stating that it would “not assist these individuals to push their agenda that seeks media attention.” The SABC’s Chief Operations Officer, Mr Hlaudi Motsoeneng has rationalized the decision adding that “as a public service broadcaster [the SABC has the] mandate to educate the citizens, and [had] therefore have taken this bold decision to show that violent protests are not necessary.” The suggestion that the public will be inspired to copy these violent acts is not only patronising, it is a suggestion that has no supporting evidence.

The SABC Charter in Chapter IV of the Broadcasting Act mandates the public broadcaster to “encourage the development of South African expression by providing [...] programming that, *among other aims*;

- Reflects the South African attitudes, opinions, ideas, values and artistic creativity;
- Offers a plurality of views and variety of news, information and analysis from a South African point of view; and
- Advances the national and public interest.

The SABC Charter is central to ensuring that the public broadcaster retains the essential characteristics of freedom of expression, journalistic, creativity and programming independence. Furthermore, the recently revised editorial policies of the SABC state that public broadcaster must provide “consistent, relevant, useful and high quality programming, including information and analysis.” The latest decision by the SABC is contrary to the tenants that are encapsulated in the Broadcasting Act and the SABC Charter. The role of the public of the SABC as a public institution is to service the information needs of the people of South Africa and to engage expose critical issues that allow all to make informed decisions on matters that are of local and national significance. Rather than banning the airing of visuals containing violence, the SABC should in fact be advancing contextual and balanced reporting that will sustain and deepen trust in the SABC as a source of high quality information and analysis.

It is imperative that the SABC reflects the views, attitudes and opinions of all without arbitrary filters that distort true narratives in South Africa. The FXI will be lodging a complaint with ICASA, the Complaints and Compliance Committee in a call to rescind the decision by management and editorial staff within the SABC.

Executive Committee: Anton (chairperson), Raymond Louw, Nobuntu Mbelle, Indra de Lanerolle, William Gumede, Oupa Lebogo, Sam Radebe, Franz Kruger. **Executive Director:** Tusi Fokane

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