

Media Institute of Southern Africa - South African Chapter
Press Statement

Attempts to censor journalists condemned

The South African Chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa has been deeply shocked by reports from Limpopo province of journalists being denied entry to the provincial legislature and interference in TV broadcast programmes by provincial government officials. The conduct of the officials amounts to attempts at censorship.

In the first week of May provincial government officials barred SA Broadcasting Corporation TV journalists and a camera crew from entering the provincial legislature to report on the Lebowakgomo provincial government's budget vote. Two weeks earlier Premier Sello Moloto's political adviser Jack Mokobi is reported to have stormed into the SABC offices to complain about the "harsh" manner in which politicians were interviewed and to demand that Thobela FM's Willie Mosoma be removed from his post as current affairs presenter.

MISA-SA condemns this conduct as outrageous breaches of South Africa's Constitution. Not only have the key media freedom and freedom of expression rights and the rights to access to information outlined in the Constitution been contravened, but also the clauses demanding strict obligations on state officials to uphold these rights.

Clause 7 (2) states that "the state must respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights in the Bill of Rights" and clause 8 (1) states that "the Bill of Rights applies to all law, and binds the legislature, the executive, the judiciary and all organs of state".

These Constitutional demands are onerous and require state officials scrupulously to uphold the Constitutional requirement that the media be accorded the utmost freedom to carry out its duties. The conduct of the Limpopo officials clearly contravened the Constitution.

MISA-SA has noted that contraventions of clauses 7 and 8 in a similar manner by other governmental institutions, including those at provincial and municipal levels, are increasing, depriving the media of their rightful access to information and their duty to exercise freedom of expression.

MISA-SA calls on the Limpopo Premier Moloto to discipline the offending officials and to ensure that similar offences are not committed in future. It also calls on the national government to strengthen and clarify legislation to ensure that state officials at all levels of government are held accountable for their Constitutional responsibilities.

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