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SOS Welcomes Ministerial Appointment of ICT Policy Review Panel & Now Calls for a Transparent, Participatory & Efficient Review

11 December 2012

Since the SOS: Support Public Broadcasting Coalition's inception in June 2008, the Coalition has been campaigning for an ICT policy review process. The Coalition, therefore, warmly welcomes the Minister of Communications' announcement yesterday of the ICT Policy Review Panel that will advise the Department of Communications (DoC) as it moves towards developing a Green Paper, White Paper and an Integrated National ICT Policy. The Coalition is also delighted to see that three of its own nominees have been appointed to the Review Panel.

The importance of the ICT policy review process cannot be overstated. The last White Paper drafted on Broadcasting was in 1998. Further, no detailed policy process – including Green or White Paper – preceded the promulgation of the Electronic Communications Act, 2005 – a singularly important piece of legislation which deals with issues of convergence between broadcasting and telecommunications.

This lack of a coherent policy vision for the sector, despite considerable advances in respect of technologies and markets, on the one hand, coupled with on-going deep structural problems and regulatory weakness in the sector, on the other, has been sorely felt.

In April this year the Minister announced that she would be embarking on a Green Paper process to be completed by December 2012, a White Paper process to be completed by 2013 and a review including amendments of all ICT legislation to be completed by 2014. At the international ICT Indaba conference held in June she then announced that she would be setting up the Review Panel and she called for public nominations.

While SOS welcomes the announcement of the Panel, the Coalition also notes that the critical deadlines set in April have been missed – and by more than half a year. Further, the Coalition notes

that the announcement made in April itself was long overdue, with the Ministry talking about the urgent need for a policy review process since 2008.

The Coalition, therefore, calls on the DoC to announce a new set of **non-negotiable** deadlines. The Coalition will be also campaigning strongly for this Review to be prioritised in terms of the Department's workplans for 2013 as well as for the necessary funding and capacity to facilitate the Review.

Further, the Coalition will be resounding its call for the process to be transparent and entail significant and broad-based public participation through giving real substance to the proposed "forum for stakeholder interaction." We remind the DoC of the Coalition's 2011 [proposed roadmap](#) for the Review and the key deliverables - *viz* a comprehensive policy review, leading to a Green and White Paper process - required to hold all role-players accountable to one another. We, therefore, call on the DoC to carry though the policy review process into the Green and White Paper process with vision, a forward-looking grasp of the sector, and a continued commitment to transparency, leadership and public participation

Over a number of years the Coalition has developed a [vision document](#) that includes a set of detailed policy recommendations to ensure the independence, good governance and funding of public broadcasting in the digital age.

Some of the key recommendations SOS has put forward include:

- Turning the SABC into a Chapter 9 Institution, protected by the Constitution;
- Financing the SABC's performance of its public mandate directly from the public purse and having the Auditor General be responsible for Auditing the broadcaster's financial statements;
- Developing a coherent framework which provides for sustainable public funding options and effective governance structures in the community broadcasting sector which will help establish it as an attractive and sustainable alternative to mainstream media;
- Reconstituting the Independent Communication Authority of South Africa (ICASA) into a fully-fledged Chapter 9 Institution;
- Bolstering ICASA's financial and human resource capacity to enable it to effectively monitor and ensure broadcasters' adherence to their license conditions;

The Coalition hopes to present this document, an earlier version of which was presented to the Department in 2011, to the Ministerial Panel in the near future as an important civil society contribution to the overall ICT Policy Review process.

The SOS Coalition represents a number of trade unions including COSATU, COSATU affiliates CWU and CWUSA, FEDUSA, BEMAWU and MWASA; independent film and TV production sector organisations including the South African Screen Federation (SASFED); and a host of NGOs and CBOs including the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI), Media Monitoring Africa (MMA), and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA-SA); as well as a number of academics and freedom of expression activists.

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