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SOS DISMAYED BY REPEATED SABC CRISES

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Once again the SABC finds itself in the news for the wrong reasons and has, once again, remained conspicuously silent. Over the last two weeks alone, the SABC has been wracked with a series of crises both in its leadership as well as in its programming and editorial management. These are neither new, nor surprising any longer. They are simply yet another iteration in the SABC's full repertoire of repeats.

Repeated Failure to Meet License Conditions

Following the launch of Media Monitoring Africa's independent [report](#) highlighting the lack of diversity and inordinate repeats in SABC programming, which the broadcaster criticised the methodology, but not the issues raised, the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) has also released its own damning report on the broadcaster's recurring non-compliance.

The SOS Coalition has consistently underscored that the SABC, being *the* public broadcaster, carries the singularly important responsibility of informing, educating and entertaining all South Africans. With this being the case, why is it still and consistently continuing to fail to meet the bare minimum standards under its license conditions and local content quotas?

In the face of the imminent migration to digital terrestrial television which requires the public to purchase new hardware (set-top boxes *and* aerials) in order to watch their televisions, as well as the proposed increase in television license fees, can the SABC, with these results, truly say it is giving South Africans value-for-money? And does it stand any chance of competing with any success in the oncoming multichannel environment when it is already performing so poorly with the three channels it has now?

A Repeat of the Blacklisting Saga?

Last week the media reported on the alleged banning of Julius Malema across all SABC News and Current Affairs programming. This is reported to have been an ongoing practice which, despite Acting News Head Jimi Matthews' [assurances](#) to the contrary under the premise of the necessity of nuanced reporting, has resulted in the editing out of Mr Malema from radio and television news and, most recently, the [canning](#) of his planned interview on Metro FM on 10 September 2012.

After the still unresolved blacklisting saga of 2007, SOS is alarmed that, yet again, the SABC would be shrouded by the spectre of censorship. In addition to this is the perceived underrepresentation and exclusion by the broadcaster of opposition and minority political parties as was demonstrated by the

IFP march last Friday. This follows on the [banning](#) of the fully paid for AfriForum “Conmen” advert in June this year. How is the SABC supposed to ever be the credible news and information source it has been created to be while it is mired by unabated reports of being used as a political battle ground?

SOS believes that the SABC should be representative of and speak to all South Africans. The role the SABC must occupy and needs to revert to is that of a facilitator of dialogue among all South Africans, and it is incumbent on its leadership through its Head of News and Editor in Chief to demonstrate that.

Repeat in Leadership Crisis

At its special briefing to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Communications on 11 August 2012, the SABC Board, which was tasked with stabilising the leadership of the SABC as well as overseeing its financial management, reported ongoing and further crises within the broadcaster.

Following the suspension of Acting Head of Procurements, Nompilo Dlamini, amidst allegations of a failure to comply with supply chain management policy, the Board has now suspended newly appointed CFO, Gugu Duda with immediate effect. To add to this and the litany of suspensions and resignations that have beleaguered the SABC in recent years, including the yet uncertain state of Phil Molefe’s employment, the Board has also taken a [vote of no confidence](#) against Adv. Cawekazi Mahlathi and has called for the immediate termination of her service to the Board.

In an embarrassing display before the Portfolio Committee this [Tuesday](#), South Africans were presented with yet another repeat in the long series of squabbles which have historically wracked the SABC Board, leading to its total disarray in the first place. Yet again, the Board is mired with allegations of unbecoming behaviour, disorder, secretiveness and corruption.

The SOS Coalition is dismayed that under a Board mandated with steering and overseeing the turnaround of the broadcaster, the state of the SABC’s leadership is still and continues to be in such disarray. The Coalition supports the full investigation of and decisive action taken against undue and improper behaviour by any member of the SABC, but is deeply concerned about the extent to which persons who continue to fail the broadcaster and South Africans continue to be appointed to lead it.

When will we see an SABC Board that is stable or that isn’t sullied by scandal? When will we see an SABC that works?

Repeated Demands

SOS has repeatedly emphasised that the SABC is and should be treated as a public utility. For the sake of all South Africans, it cannot be allowed to fail. In order to do this, across all levels of its operations and governance, there needs to be a strong and visionary leadership and not the ongoing crisis management in both its governance and management that we have seen up until now.

We demand an SABC that is able to meet and exceed the minimum requirements of licensing conditions in the public service. We demand an SABC that is not mired by controversies about censorship and ineffectual leadership. We demand an SABC that works.

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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