



**SOS: Support Public Broadcasting Coalition**

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## **SOS Responds to the Proposed New SABC Board**

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The SOS Coalition notes the candidates recommended by the Portfolio Committee on Communications for the SABC Board. The SABC has, for all too long, been wracked by serious instability and conflicts at various levels and, most notably, at the Board level, resulting in an alarming turn over of five Boards in five years.

The Coalition further notes the paucity of broadcasters and journalists in the SABC Board whom we believe would play a critical role in advocating for and realising systems which would improve the amount and quality of local and public oriented programming.

We are alarmed by reports of the recommended Board members being pushed through the Committee by the majority party with little negotiation and consensus building between all Committee members. The Coalition has repeatedly made the point that the Committee must seek to build full consensus in its selection of a skilled, experienced and fully representative Board which enjoys the full confidence of the public it serves.

Should they be appointed by the President, the task faced by this proposed new Board is vast. The SOS Coalition, however, believes that the following achievable focus areas will set it a good foundation in transforming the SABC:

1. Demonstrating a culture of openness, transparency and engagement with the public on both its challenges and successes and instilling this culture within the organisation itself;
2. Listening to and including the voice of all SABC staff who have demonstrated their commitment to and passion for public broadcasting in the interventions being taken to turn the SABC around;
3. Committing to good corporate governance and working closely with the JTT appointed by the Minister in August, this year, to establish financial reporting mechanisms that comply with the Public Finance Management Act and the Auditor General's requirements so that the SABC can be able to show clean audits and gain public confidence;
4. Resolving conflicts surrounding top management posts and making the requisite and permanent appointments particularly with respect to the posts of:
  - a. Chief Financial Officer;

- b. Chief Operations Officer; and
  - c. Head of News and Current Affairs.
5. Concluding a widely consultative and fully participatory Editorial Policy Review that not only sets high standards for quality programming that reflects all of the people of South Africa, but also provides mechanisms for monitoring and compliance;

The Coalition further urges the Board to respond firmly against the injunction set by the COO, Mr Hlaudi Motsoeneng, for 70% sunshine journalism on SABC news. It is our belief that this intrudes on the foundational principles of editorial independence and journalistic integrity.

We believe it bears stating that the collective skills and experience of the candidates recommended to the Board alone will not serve as a panacea to the SABC's problems, most of which are historical and structural.

For an SABC that works, we need all stakeholders to come to the party and fulfil their respective roles towards building a vibrant and enabling broadcasting sector in which the SABC can thrive.

1. The Communications Ministry must realise, through the ICT Policy Review, an enabling policy framework through which public service broadcasting and the institutions tasked with realising it are able to do so;
2. ICASA must assert its independence from all vested interests and play its role in monitoring and enforcing the SABC's compliance with its local and public programming requirements more robustly; and
3. The people of South Africa must take ownership of their public broadcaster and participate actively in the processes and engagements which can help it to grow, as well as invest in local and quality public programming by paying their TV licenses.

South Africa deserves an SABC that works, and the SOS Coalition believes it is possible.

The SOS Coalition represents a broad spectrum of civil society stakeholders committed to the broadcasting of quality, diverse, citizen-orientated public-interest programming aligned to the goals of the SA Constitution. The Coalition includes a number of trade union federations including COSATU and FEDUSA, a number of independent unions including BEMAWU and MWASA; independent film and TV production sector organisations including the South African Screen Federation (SASFED); a host of NGOs and CBOs including the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) and Media Monitoring Africa (MMA), and a number of academics and freedom of expression activists.

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