

DECLARATION ON THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC INTEREST TELEVISION BROADCASTING

INTRODUCTION

This Declaration is issued following the Summit on the Future of Public Interest Television Broadcasting held on 8 July 2026 in Johannesburg, hosted by the SOS Support Public Broadcasting Coalition. It records the principal issues, discussions, concerns and proposals raised during the summit. It should not be interpreted as representing unanimous agreement among all participants, but rather as a voluntary instrument endorsed by organisations and individuals who support the principles, recommendations and proposed actions contained in this Declaration.

PREAMBLE

RECALLING Article 9 of the *African Charter*, which guarantees the right of every individual to receive information and to express and disseminate opinions within the law, and Article 13, which guarantees the right to equal access to the public services of the country.

RECOGNISING the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)'s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, which affirms that States have an obligation to facilitate freedom of expression and access to information online, promote universal, equitable, affordable and meaningful internet access, and take positive measures to promote a diverse and pluralistic media.

COGNISANT of the ACHPR Resolution 631, working towards the assessment of public interest content in this digital era and developing Guidelines to ensure a public interest element for all platforms operating in Africa.

COGNISANT of the ACHPR Resolution 630 on developing Guidelines to assist States to monitor technology companies in respect of their duty to maintain information integrity through independent fact-checking.

RECOGNISING the ACHPR Guidelines on Access to Information and Elections in Africa which affirm that access to information is a foundational requirement of the practice of democratic governance. The Guidelines underscore the obligation of States to create an atmosphere that fosters access to information and ensures adequate disclosure and dissemination of information in a manner that offers the necessary facilities and eliminates existing obstacles to its attainment.

REAFFIRMING the African Charter on Broadcasting which encourages broadcasting legal frameworks to contain principles such as promoting respect for freedom of expression, diversity, and the free flow of information and ideas, as well as a three-tier system for broadcasting. The Charter places an obligation on states to promote an economic environment that facilitates the development of independent production and diversity in broadcasting.

REAFFIRMING the Windhoek+30 Declaration on Information as a Public Good, which affirms that access to information through transparent systems is a public good essential to democracy, human rights, and sustainable development.

ACKNOWLEDGING the significant technological, economic and regulatory changes affecting South Africa's broadcasting and information ecosystem.

NOTING the issues, concerns and recommendations recorded in the Supplementary Background Statement on the Future of Public Interest Television Broadcasting.

RECOGNISING individual efforts by certain organisations and institutions and acknowledging that no single stakeholder can resolve these challenges alone and affirming the need for collective effort, shared responsibility and sustained collaboration.

BELIEVING that safeguarding universal access to trusted public interest content requires sustained collaboration among government, regulators, broadcasters, civil society, industry, academia and other stakeholders.

This Declaration therefore represents a shared statement of principles and commitments agreed upon by the diverse stakeholders who participated in the Summit.

It is intended to foster greater coordination, build consensus around key priorities, and ensure that South Africa's digital transition protects constitutional rights, media viability and diversity, strengthens democracy and secures universal access to public interest information.

KEY SUBMISSIONS

1. Participants observed that the Broadcasting Digital Migration (BDM) process remains a crisis and requires urgent intervention to ensure that an overwhelming majority of households have migrated before any further analogue switch-off (ASO) decisions are taken.
2. Participants highlighted that one of the major flaws of the BDM process was the lack of consultation, and emphasised the need for meaningful, transparent and inclusive multi-stakeholder consultations, including direct engagement with affected communities and sustained cross-sector coordination.
3. Participants noted that marginalised communities continue to face infrastructure barriers, including unreliable electricity supply, limited network coverage, inadequate internet access and affordability constraints.
4. Participants noted that it is unacceptable for the “missing middle” to remain inadequately supported to have continued access to FTA television.
5. Participants highlighted that any future ASO must be rights-based, independently verified and supported by transparent readiness data, including thresholds, functioning reception, affordability and sustainable free-to-air access.
6. Participants noted that DTT should not be the sole option for BDM, and called for the consideration of how terrestrial, satellite, broadband, mobile and emerging technologies can be integrated to advance universal access and the long-term sustainability of public-interest television.
7. Participants highlighted that a clear, broad, yet inclusive definition of public-interest content is required for future policy development.
8. Participants observed that South Africa’s broadcasting policy framework needs to be comprehensive and modernised so that it can address the full public-interest media value chain.
9. Many participants emphasised that a premature or poorly managed ASO could result in audience loss and revenue decline, threatening the sustainability of broadcasters and undermining constitutional access to information.
10. Participants noted that structural policy vacuum, delayed reform, and an outdated legislative framework continue to affect the broadcasting sector.
11. Participants observed that, in the digital age, universal access must extend beyond broadcasting to encompass broadband connectivity, affordability, access to devices and data, disability inclusion, language diversity, zero-rated public-interest content, digital literacy and the discoverability of public interest content across all platforms.
12. Participants also noted that the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) urgently requires an updated and expedited funding model, broadcasting policy framework, and the SABC Bill, aligned to provide clarity on public service mandate, commercial activities, governance obligations and funding responsibilities, while strengthening the SABC’s long-term sustainability.
13. Participants also noted that the BDM policy framework is outdated and needs to be reviewed urgently.

14. Participants highlighted that the digital platform era is reshaping public access to information, with limited discoverability, recommendation systems, monetisation models and algorithmic processes influencing what content audiences can find and access.
15. Participants further highlighted that due to the vulnerability of community television, explicit protection is required during the migration process, to ensure funding and platform-access reforms to combat the severe sustainability risks it continues to face.

PRINCIPLES

We, the undersigned, hereby declare our support for the following principles:

a) A rights-based digital migration

The BDM must be implemented in a manner that protects and advances the constitutional rights to freedom of expression, access to information, equality and democratic participation. The implementation of BDM must remain consistent with the Constitution, the rule of law and the judgments of the courts.

b) The public interest as the guiding principle

The primary objective of digital migration must be to serve the public interest by safeguarding media diversity and pluralism, strengthening the long-term sustainability of public, commercial and community free-to-air broadcasters, and ensuring universal access to trusted public interest content and services.

c) Leave no one behind

South Africa's transition to digital broadcasting must be inclusive, equitable and affordable. No person or household should lose access to public interest television or information because of the implementation of ASO.

d) Meaningful multi-stakeholder governance

Digital migration should be guided by transparent, inclusive and ongoing engagement between government, the Regulator, broadcasters, Parliament, civil society, industry and affected communities. Major policy and implementation decisions should be informed by evidence and collaborative decision-making.

e) Universal access in the digital age

Universal access to public interest content extends beyond terrestrial broadcasting and should encompass all appropriate digital delivery platforms. Public interest content should remain universally accessible, affordable, discoverable and inclusive regardless of the technology through which it is delivered.

f) A sustainable public interest media ecosystem

The successful completion of digital migration depends on the financial sustainability of public interest television broadcasting. Policy, regulatory and funding frameworks should strengthen, not weaken, the capacity of public, commercial and community broadcasters to fulfil their public interest mandates.

g) Technology-neutral policy

South Africa's broadcasting framework should adopt a technology-neutral approach that objectively evaluates Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT), Direct-to-Home (DTH) satellite services, internet-based delivery platforms and future technologies based on evidence, public interest outcomes and long-term sustainability.

RESOLUTIONS

We, the undersigned organisations and individuals, further adopt the following resolutions proposed at the summit as fundamental to securing the future of public interest television broadcasting in South Africa. To give effect to the aforementioned principles, we support the following resolutions:

a) Prerequisites for a lawful and inclusive analogue switch-off include:

- The completion of the BDM process in a manner that is lawful, rights-based, inclusive and consistent with constitutional obligations.
- The establishment of transparent and ongoing multi-stakeholder consultation processes to guide implementation and future policy decisions.
- The establishment of a multi-stakeholder **Crisis Action Committee (CAC)** to coordinate implementation, stakeholder engagement, monitoring and reporting on the digital migration process, with appropriate institutional and financial support.

b) Readiness conditions necessary for the analogue switch-off to take place include:

- Reviewing and updating the qualifying income threshold of R3 500 for subsidised set-top-boxes (STBs) to reflect South Africa's current socio-economic realities.
- Developing measures to support the "missing middle" so that households unable to afford migration equipment are not excluded from accessing public interest television post ASO.
- Ensuring that 90% of indigent households have installed and functioning reception equipment before ASO proceeds.
- Ensuring that 90% of households categorised as the "missing middle" have access to affordable and appropriate migration solutions before the ASO is implemented.
- Setting a moratorium on the ASO until all defined readiness conditions have been met, including the aforementioned prerequisites.

c) Sustainable funding for public interest television is fundamental to ensure that:

- Digital migration must strengthen the long-term sustainability of public, commercial and community broadcasters.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES (DCDT)

1. Commission independent research on digital migration experiences across Africa and the globe to inform the review and urgent modernisation of the BDM Policy framework and future implementation, including assessment of DTT, DTH/satellite, broadband-enabled distribution,

- mobile networks and emerging technologies, as well as cost, coverage, affordability, reliability, spectrum implications, institutional capacity, local content carriage, competition and long-term fiscal sustainability.
2. Conduct a comprehensive technical and community verification audit of the digital migration programme, including household access statistics, set-top-box (STB) functionality and installation quality, maintenance and distribution infrastructure, expenditure, and the reliability of data used for decision-making, supported by spot checks, follow-up surveys and household-level confirmation of working reception and continued access to free-to-air public-interest television services.
 3. Develop a revised ASO readiness framework that establishes a clear 90% access threshold for indigent and “missing middle” households to free-to-air services, while putting safeguards in place for households that rely on intermittent access to subscription television.
 4. Ensure that the subsidy threshold of R3500 and qualification criteria are reviewed to address the “missing middle”, this threshold agreed upon more than a decade ago is no longer sufficient due to inflation and the rising cost of living.
 5. Ensure that public interest content is recognised as a public good and is protected through appropriate policy, regulatory and funding measures to safeguard its universal availability, affordability, discoverability and accessibility across platforms.
 6. Ensure that a universal digital public access framework is developed to promote affordable and inclusive access to public interest content across platforms, including affordable broadband, subsidised or sponsored devices, digital literacy, disability inclusion, language diversity, discoverability and must-carry arrangements on designated digital public infrastructure, with provision for the zero-rating of qualifying public-interest content on streaming and video-on-demand (VOD) platforms.
 7. Develop a definition for public interest content in consultation with all the relevant stakeholders to guide zero-rating, platform prominence, must-carry, funding and regulatory obligations.
 8. Ensure that the SABC funding model is finalised and recognises the cost of the public mandate, protects editorial independence and supports digital transformation.
 9. Develop a comprehensive sustainability framework for community broadcasting that provides for infrastructure support, skills development, assistance with the digital transition, access to audience data, support for local content production, and sustainable funding mechanisms.
 10. Ensure that a sustainable broadcast signal-distribution infrastructure is maintained to secure continued affordable access to public interest television and support the viability of broadcasters.
 11. Ensure that the ASO process is carefully coordinated and guided by verified household readiness, meaningful community engagement, comprehensive public awareness, and the continued availability of affordable, free-to-air public interest television services.
 12. Finalise the Audio- and Audio-Visual Media Services and Online Content Safety Policy Framework and enact the necessary legislation through a transparent and inclusive stakeholder engagement process, providing greater regulatory certainty for the broadcasting and digital media environment.
 13. Review and update the BDM Policy Framework to ensure that it adequately addresses current technological developments, access requirements, and the needs of households during the digital transition.
 14. Expedite the SABC Bill to provide a clear legislative framework that strengthens the SABC’s independence, public-service mandate, governance and long-term sustainability.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE PARLIAMENTARY PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE IN COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

The summit acknowledges the Committee's constitutional oversight mandate over the DCDT, its entities and the broader policy and regulatory environment governing public interest broadcasting, and further recognises the commitments and undertakings made by the Committee's delegation at the Summit. The Summit therefore calls on the PCCDT to:

1. Strengthen parliamentary oversight over the DCDT's implementation of the BDM programme, including requiring clear implementation plans, realistic timelines, budgetary implications, risk-mitigation measures and measurable commitments, and monitoring whether the necessary legal, constitutional, technical and readiness conditions have been met before any further ASO takes place.
2. Produce and table a comprehensive Summit Report before the Committee for consideration and adoption. Once adopted, the report should be used to strengthen parliamentary oversight.
3. Convene an urgent Parliamentary colloquium on the future of broadcasting, relevant policies and digital migration, involving the DCDT, ICASA, Sentech and other relevant stakeholders, and affected communities. The colloquium should assess the current state of BDM, identify outstanding barriers to universal access and contribute to a coordinated roadmap for a digital migration process that leaves no one behind.
4. Require clear delineation of responsibilities and accountability between the DCDT, ICASA, Sentech, the SABC and other relevant entities, so that institutional responsibility is not diffused, and Parliament can effectively monitor implementation against measurable commitments.
5. Require the DCDT to undertake and submit a comprehensive evidence-based comparative assessment of DTT, DTH, broadband-enabled distribution models and emerging hybrid solutions, examining affordability, coverage, reliability, accessibility, sustainability, local content obligations, together with clear policy recommendations, implementation options and timeframes.
6. Require the DCDT to provide regular, transparent and evidence-based reports on BDM and ASO readiness, including progress on the provision of functioning reception equipment to indigent households, assessment of the functionality and durability of installed STBs and affordable migration solutions for the "missing middle".
7. Require the DCDT to present to the Committee, comprehensive research on the digital migration experiences across Africa and the globe.
8. Exercise effective oversight over the SABC, and request the DCDT and other entities to present credible funding proposals that are consistent with public service obligations, and distinguish clearly between commercial activities and public service obligations, safeguard editorial independence, strengthen governance and accountability, support digital transformation and production of local content and ensure that public-interest content remains free or affordable across major distribution platforms.
9. Ensure that universal access is assessed beyond signal coverage and the distribution of STBs for the indigent households but includes affordability, broadband connectivity, device availability, language accessibility, disability inclusion and the particular circumstances of rural communities, townships, low-income households, young people, older persons and audiences dependent on vernacular and community media.
10. Require the DCDT to identify legislative, regulatory and institutional steps necessary to prevent high-quality public interest content from being marginalised within an increasingly complex digital ecosystem.
11. Strengthen oversight of the emerging digital public interest content environment and support a time-bound review and implementation of the broadcasting policy and regulatory framework, with clear

steering mechanism, transparent and meaningful stakeholder participation, with a view to addressing existing policy gaps and developing a comprehensive and modernised framework for the sector.

12. Ensure coordination between Parliament and the multi-stakeholder Crisis Action Committee (CAC) proposed by the Summit, including receiving regular reports on the CAC's monitoring of BDM implementation, ASO readiness and other urgent sectoral challenges, and taking appropriate oversight action where necessary.
13. Provide effective oversight of any proposed SABC funding model and the SABC Bill and ensure their expedition, and expedite the review of the ECA Amendment Bill to ensure that the legislative and funding frameworks remain fit for purpose in a converged digital environment, are affordable and sustainable, adequately fund the public mandate, clearly distinguish between public service and commercial activities, and strengthen governance, accountability and the public interest.
14. Ensure the review of the BDM policy framework and the expedited finalisation of the Draft White Paper and development of a modern communications and broadcasting frameworks that advance inclusion, strengthens democracy, protects access to trusted information, supports sustainable public interest media, and ensures that public interest content remains accessible, discoverable and relevant in a rapidly changing digital environment.
15. Ensure that the Committee provides oversight of regulatory reform relating to platform governance and accountability, including emerging digital services, access to public interest content in the digital age across different platforms.
16. Monitor the DCDT's implementation of all the recommendations contained in this Declaration, including a comprehensive public interest media framework covering public service broadcasting, community media, local content, digital distribution, media diversity, media literacy.
17. Strengthen oversight to ensure that the challenges identified and resolutions taken translate into measurable action, and that the SOS Summit Declaration is duly considered by the Committee, with a full position statement provided following its consideration.

ACTION PLAN

To advance the commitments contained in this Declaration, participants agree to establish a Crisis Action Committee (CAC), led by broadcasters and comprising representatives from government, the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), Sentech, industry, civil society and other key stakeholders. The Committee will undertake the following actions:

1. Advise on implementation of the BDM programme and facilitate multi-stakeholder engagement and provide strategic leadership on the future of broadcasting digital migration and other urgent sectoral issues.
2. Facilitate a multi-stakeholder discussion on the future role of DTT, DTH, Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms and other delivery platforms, to inform relevant policy decisions and the future of free-to air television.
3. Develop a strategy for and drive public awareness campaigns to fully inform the public of the need to migrate, where and how to register and any other public interest information related to this process.
4. Call for a moratorium on the ASO until the agreed readiness conditions have been met.
5. Implement transparent monitoring and reporting with the DCDT and provide regular reporting to the Portfolio Committee on Communications and Digital Technologies.
6. Prioritise the identification and implementation of immediate quick wins, drawing on previous proposals and work undertaken by some industry stakeholders.
7. Engage with the DCDT to expedite the finalisation of the Draft White Paper and development of a subsequent bill(s).

8. Maintain ongoing multi-stakeholder engagements to build consensus and resolve the challenges aforementioned in the supplementary background document.

CONCLUSION

The Summit reaffirmed that public interest television remains an essential public good.

This Declaration therefore calls on all relevant stakeholders to work collectively to address the challenges identified at the Summit and to implement the reforms and actions set out in this Declaration because achieving a sustainable future for public interest television requires collaboration, shared accountability and coordinated action.

The Summit further calls on the PCCDT to use its oversight and convening functions to ensure that South Africa's digital broadcasting transition remains firmly rooted in the public interest, protects constitutional rights and universal access to information, strengthens media plurality and sustainability, and ensures that no person or household is left behind.

ENDORSE THE DECLARATION

Individuals, organisations and institutions that support the principles, resolutions and commitments contained in this Declaration are invited to formally endorse it [here](#).