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SOS Calls for a Transformed and Credible SABC

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Yesterday evening, Business Day political editor, Sam Mkokeli, Sunday Times political editor, S'thembiso Msomi and bureau editor, Andrew England were scheduled to discuss the ANC's upcoming elective conference in Mangaung and how it would be covered by the media on Sakina Kamwendo's 8pm show on Metro FM. The interview was cancelled at the last minute with no real explanation beyond that it had been deemed so by "higher powers."

SOS is dismayed by these reports which mirror all too closely the same such pulling of a scheduled interview with Julius Malema earlier in September this year. The Coalition is further dismayed that these reports would emerge not three weeks after the SABC's own admission to having violated its own Charter, editorial policies and the broadcasting code in the six-year long blacklisting case saga, and, being the case, would undermine its own commitment to upholding and enforcing these in the promotion of freedom of expression and a diversity of views going forward.

In defending its decision, the SABC placed reliance on its own editorial policies yet failed to clarify whether pulling a planned interview just minutes before it was set to start was the best or only way to ensure that the important principles of objectivity, accuracy, fairness, impartiality and balance were upheld.

Does this mean that as we head up to the ruling party's elective conference or any other such political event of national importance, no dialogue may nor will be facilitated by the public broadcaster unless the ANC has a representative present? Were this the case, this morning's edition of SAfm's *Workers* on Wednesday which posed the question "*Cosatu and Mangaung – What's in it for the Working Class?*" could not have proceeded!

This not only suggests that the SABC's approach to editorial is an *ad hoc* one which is simply not grounded in principle, indeed, this controversy further edifies the established perception that the public broadcaster is no more than a tool with and through which the ruling party secures and displays its hold on political power.

The SOS Coalition has consistently maintained that the SABC needs to unshackle itself from the position it occupies as the ugly duckling of freedom of expression and media freedom and transform itself, being *the* public broadcaster, to be the foremost bastion of these ideals. We, therefore, remind the SABC again that consistent compliance with the editorial codes as well as fearlessly encouraging a diversity of views is critical to building and edifying the SABC's long compromised credibility.

We deserve a transformed SABC. We deserve a credible SABC. We deserve 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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