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The SABC Needs to Review its Editorial Policies. And Stick to Them.

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Last week the SOS Coalition was one of the many voices which decried the ostensible irregularities in editorial practice in the SABC after management, at the last minute, pulled a scheduled live interview on Media coverage of the ANC's Mangaung elective conference.. This latest case of a Metro FM show being cancelled at the last minute is not only indicative of a broadcaster operating on fear but also serves to highlight the critical importance of editorial policies and how they are applied.

In our press statement calling for a transformed and credible SABC we asked whether this meant that every show concerning the ANC elective conference or any other such event, as a matter of policy, necessarily required the concerned party's representative? How feasible is it for a broadcaster with three television channels and 18 radio stations to ensure the dialogue is able to continue under these circumstances? And, does this interpretation of the editorial policy realise the public broadcaster's mandate to promote a diversity of views or actually frustrate it?

The Coalition welcomes the preliminary investigation the Independent Communication Authority of South Africa (ICASA) has undertaken in respect of the canning of last Monday's Metro FM show. We hope this will be the first of many steps the authority takes in holding the SABC to uphold and enforce its editorial policies as it promised it would do going forward in its settlement of the "Blacklisting case" with the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) last month.

This, however, is not all that is required for the full transformation and renewal of the SABC's credibility. SOS calls on the SABC to inform the public of its plans for a transparent, broad-based and fully participatory editorial review. Given that the review is 3 years overdue it is essential that a comprehensive public process begins in earnest in the first quarter of 2013.

Being *the* public broadcaster, the SABC is charged with the onerous responsibility of being the true voice of South Africa and a mirror of our society, reflecting our myriad views, experiences and perspectives. The only way to ensure that it continues to play that role is that the SABC renew and demonstrate its commitment to its mandate without fear or favour.

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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