



SOS: Support Public Broadcasting Coalition

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SOS CONCERNED BY REPORTS OF FURTHER WASTEFUL EXPENDITURE IN THE SABC

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The SOS Coalition is concerned by media reports in the Star that the SABC has taken the decision to convert a number of freelancers at the SABC into full-time staff. The SABC has a policy that clearly stipulates all positions must be advertised and all employees and citizens should be given the opportunity to apply for such positions. By simply converting freelancers into permanent employees the opportunity to apply for those positions is taken away from current and prospective employees and it opens the door for employment of friends and family members.

This also flies in the face of one of the conditions of the Corporation's R1.47bn government guarantee. The guarantee calls for the corporation to cut its headcount and, commensurately, its wage bill to ensure long-term sustainability

While the Coalition believes that this latest decision may be very much in the interests of the freelancers themselves, we insist that the SABC follows proper procedure and policy in appointing anyone in any position at the SABC and we are not convinced that this is in the interests of the long-term sustainability and financial health of the SABC. Particularly alarming is acting group executive for human capital services, Keobokile Mosweu's admission that an audit determining the financial impact of the decision was still only underway – *after* the fact of the appointments!

The key issue for the Coalition is how this decision fits into the SABC's important turnaround strategy which the SABC has been working on since 2010.

The Coalition's understanding of the turnaround strategy is that, at its heart, it is supposed to ensure that the SABC gets back on a sound financial footing after its serious financial crisis in the 2008 / 2009 financial year. The Corporation lost close to R1bn. The government guarantee was organised by the SABC's interim Board to assist with cash flow and to ensure immediate stability of the Corporation.

We are concerned as it appears that the SABC is pushing forward with no proper and sound strategy in place as the conversion of freelancers never formed part of the turnaround strategy. It is against this backdrop that SOS calls on the SABC Board and CEO to provide South Africans with sound evidence that the decision was taken having had due regard of a coherent and detailed turnaround strategy which entails present future HR needs in the DTT environment as well as its long-term financial stability, and how it serves to meet this.

SOS has, on a number of occasions, issued statements calling for the SABC to move swiftly forward to put in place and make available a coherent strategy that includes at its centre the broadcast of quality, local, public service programming. However, over the last few years the Coalition has been disturbed by the following:

- The amount of money, maybe hundreds of millions of rand (R100m of which we know was paid to Deloitte Consulting) that has been spent by consultants on crafting the turnaround strategy with no clear results. To date the SABC has not tabled a final coherent plan.
- That the SABC's last annual report indicates that the corporation has failed to significantly cut fruitless and wasteful expenditure. This currently stands at almost R137m, up from R75m in the preceding financial year.
- That since the financial crisis it appears that one of the significant savings made by the SABC has been through the cutting back on programming by R226m (which translates into 65.8% of the profit reported by the corporation.)
- That since the financial crisis the head count at the SABC has in fact increased by 2% and the wage bill by 6.24% rather than decreased. And this despite the fact that there was a collective understanding that staff, particularly at the top-heavy management level, needed to be cut.

The Coalition, therefore, calls on the SABC to table in Parliament a coherent and comprehensive turnaround strategy which includes clear targets, deadlines and, significantly, accountability mechanisms to ensure that these are met. The Coalition further calls on the SABC Board and CEO to explain to viewers and listeners and the general public what their vision is for public broadcasting and how they intend to implement this vision. Further, and against this backdrop, SOS calls on the SABC's Board and CEO to issue a statement explaining how this latest decision on making freelancers permanent will ensure the long term financial health of the SABC including, most importantly, ensuring the broadcast of quality, local public programming.

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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