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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** **THE STATE OF AFFAIRS AT THE SABC**

The SOS Coalition is deeply concerned at the current state of affairs at the SABC. The Coalition notes with disappointment its thwarted attempts to meet its GCEO, Ms. Lulama Mokhobo. This meeting has, yet again, been rescheduled by Ms Mokhobo for the third time, the latest being this morning.

On the agenda of the meeting the Coalition had hoped to discuss these issues: the local content issues on SABC television, the 24 hour news channel, the broadcaster's DTT readiness, its editorial policies update, turn-around strategy, financial situation and more...

This meeting is important to the SOS Coalition because we believe that the SABC, being the public broadcaster, needs to be open, reliable, efficient and effective. The question then arises, how is the SABC a public broadcaster if it does not avail itself to the public for robust engagement and debate?

This particular toss and turn response that we are getting from the office of the GCEO further alarms us as regards the current state of affairs at the SABC. Last week it was announced that the SABC's 24 hour news channel will be launched soon. This channel would first be available on DSTV and later be offered on digital terrestrial TV when DTT switch-on occurs. The Coalition is concerned that the 24 hour news channel to be shown on DSTV will exclude millions of South Africans that cannot afford subscription television. It is also not clear what DSTV's involvement in this 24 hour news channel, in fact, is.

The SABC's relationship with DSTV merits closer scrutiny. The Coalition is concerned at the alleged deal made by the SABC to sell off the rights to the SABC's most popular "soapies" to DSTV. The Coalition believes that the public broadcaster must account for this deal – why are rights being sold to a subscription broadcaster when the public broadcaster's mandate is to provide appropriate public content to South African audiences on a free to air basis?

The SABC is also facing a major challenge with regard to local content on its television stations. Not all languages are equitably represented. For example, the only Sepedi drama on SABC right now is Bophelo Ke Semphego, this drama is over 25 years old and has been repeated on numerous occasions over the years. This is a major challenge; the SABC is expected to produce

new and exciting local drama that reflects the identity of all south Africans in the new democratic South Africa.

The challenge is also that when SABC is under the gun to ensure minority language delivery, random projects are targeted for language delivery even if the language chosen bears no integral relationship with the editorial of the show. Surely there must be a sustained and robust policy of language delivery that ensures editorial integrity too?

Accordingly, the SABC is expected to review its editorial guidelines every five years. The last review was in 2004. Eight years ago! The Coalition is told that the review is underway, through the "My SABC" campaign. However the Coalition is worried that the review is not widely publicised and the link between the "My SABC campaign and the review is not clear. We urge the SABC to make this review a transparent and participatory process.

The Coalition would also like to engage the GCEO on the editorial vision for the public broadcaster and what actual programs she can imagine under her tenure? The prime business output for the SABC is public broadcast programming for the citizenry, yet there is little to no discussion, outside of the implementation of policies and procedures, on the elevated programming course she will be steering.

We are also dismayed at the lack of in-depth conversation as to what may have gone wrong in programming to lose the audiences that SABC has. What editorial introspection has the SABC embarked upon?

We are also dismayed to find that amongst senior management that may steer the editorial vision, very few have content as their core skill. The problem that we may face is an over prioritisation of business processes and bureaucracy at the loss of an editorial soul, and we know that where audiences go hinges on who provides programming relevance, creativity and resonance.

If media reports are correct, the SABC has continually assured South Africa that the SABC's financial standing has dramatically improved and that the turn-around strategy is eventually paying off. Whilst the Coalition commends Ms Mokhobo and her team for bringing this stability. The Coalition would like to see these developments leading to more citizen focused programming, the review of editorial policies and willingness by the public broadcaster to openly engage citizens and civil society on these issues and more...

Our meeting has been rescheduled to the 22nd of August 2012; the Coalition hopes that Ms Lulama Mokhobo and her team can meet us then. The Coalition had arranged a press conference for tomorrow to discuss the outcomes of the meeting. Due to this postponement, the press conference will also only take place on the 22nd of August 2012. We hope Ms Mokhobo and her team will join us.

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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