

**SPEECH BY**  
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**GROUP EXECUTIVE: NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS**



**DATE: Friday, 03 July 2020**

**TIME: 10h00**

**SUBJECT: SABC Presents the Final Draft of the Editorial Policies**

**MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT**  
**SABC BOARD MEMBERS**  
**GROUP EXECUTIVES**  
**MEMBERS OF PUBLIC AND CIVIL SOCIETY**  
**DISTINGUISHED GUESTS**  
**MEMBERS OF THE MEDIA**  
**FELLOW COLLEAGUES**

Good morning

The Editorial Policies being launched today serve as our newsroom's decision-making architecture. The reviewed policies come at a time when we are focusing our attention on doing what the public mandate truly demands of us. As journalists in the public news service, we are in a privileged position to not only cover stories routinely, but to exercise our duty as custodians to document the collective experiences and memory of the citizenry.

The COVID-19 pandemic, as with other disasters that societies get to deal with at different times, has reminded us as journalists that during periods of information chaos, the dangers of alarmist, sensational and conspiratorial reportage can have a long-lasting devastating effect not only on society, but on editorial and journalistic integrity. The collective wisdom, aggregate intelligence and the shared journalistic conscience in our newsrooms, provide us with a great opportunity and the capacity to produce evidence-based, courageous and incisive journalism. We need to tap into this more as a dependable self-checking system, as we pursue critical watchdog journalism.

Our commitment to editorial independence and impartiality, requires that we introspect as individual journalists and question our editorial and journalistic intent in all the decision we make, including deployments and resourcing of stories, the voices we chose to reflect or ignore, as well as the aspects we chose to elevate and foreground in our storytelling. Being impartial requires us to constantly exercise internal surveillance and interrogate our intent in what we do and what we say.

Our public interest obligation demands that we go beyond the convenience of covering the cities, not just journalistic tourist trips to the villages and distressed communities, but to spend time with those in the periphery of society, and mainstream their stories and circumstances in our coverage. Our commitment to inclusivity and social justice, means that we need to recognize the

humanity of all citizens, women and children in general, and the plight of women and children in rural areas, in particular, all underreported communities and minorities, and spotlight their right to be treated with respect and dignity. It also demands that we eschew any temptation to silence voices that are critical of what we do. Sometimes, this can be brutal criticism that makes us uncomfortable. However, we always have to bear in mind that it is never about us, it is never about how we feel, but it's about ensuring inclusivity, impartiality and plurality of views and voices in our coverage.

As with other public services, journalism is a public good and needs to be treated, and funded as such. The provision of News and Information to the public is a mandatory essential service. Citizens, regardless of their position in society, need and deserve credible news and information to make informed decisions in their daily lives. That means we need to go beyond the headlines, transcend first phase journalism, avoid echo chambers and deliver perceptive journalism. But the real and obvious danger to credible independent public service journalism in South Africa, is the current funding model of the SABC. When the delivery of public mandate content gets determined by market factors, due to a lack of political and social will to fund it, it puts the transparency and accountability required for resilient and vibrant democracy, at great risk. It diminishes the ability of the public news service to deliver fully on its mandate, and reduces its capacity to tell the South African story in its completeness. The consequences of this are dire for those in the fringes of society, whose voices get deliberately silenced and their visibility eroded, due to the perceived and real cost of covering them, the associated burden of seeing their distraught faces and hearing their cracking voices, and what it requires to improve their circumstances. There's only one conclusion to draw from this, public mandate content needs committed financial support.

Credible high-quality journalism and information, are the thread that facilitates human interaction and inter-connectedness, and the magnet that holds societies together. Populations globally need information for human development and progress. And creating enlightened communities is a vital aspect of public service media. It helps citizens to participate effectively in the national discourse, and to test and question the strength of their governance system and democratic arrangement.

As public service journalists in the country and on the continent, we need to constantly ask ourselves, how much responsibility are we prepared to take to ensure that public accountability is exercised, and the rights of citizens are respected, and their dignity preserved? To what extent are we holding those in power, both in the private and public sectors, to commit to real selfless human development and socio-economic transformation? If public service journalism is about

complete allegiance to the citizens, what are we committing to do, to ensure that all people, regardless of their geographical location and social standing, get the credible news and information services they rightfully deserve, and in their preferred languages? What are we prepared to commit to in ensuring that our journalism is generative, transformational and impactful? What is public service journalism for? Who is it for? Whose responsibility is it to fund it? If no one does, who benefits from the information inequality that results? What are the implications for social order and stability? What will be the consequences of invisible social dislocation for the country's future? When the voices of the public fall silent because of our inability to cover them, what will sustain our democracy? What will be the ultimate cost to our democracy? Do we care? Are we bothered?

As Alan Rusbridger writes, "Power needs witnesses. Witnesses need to be able speak freely to an audience. The truth can only follow on from agreed facts. Facts can only be agreed if they can be openly articulated, tested and contested", I add, without restraint. The question is, Is our environment conducive for journalists to do this? What will it take for it to happen? As journalists, do we have the ethical and moral authority and legitimacy to interrogate those in power? These are questions we all need to answer honestly as journalists and citizens of the African continent, and do so in a sober and well-considered manner. We need to confront the challenges head on, as we continue to execute our public interest obligation with absolute independence and impartially.

Thank you