



## 06 / COMMUNICATIONS AND THE BATTLE OF IDEAS

### MEDIA FREEDOM AND DIVERSITY

- 1 The Commission reaffirmed the Stellenbosch resolutions on media transformation and, while fully appreciative of our internal capacity constraints, expressed concern about the slow pace of implementation.
- 2 The Commission re-affirmed the ANC's commitment to freedom of expression in society, including the media, within the context of the Constitution of the Republic. These rights need to be weighed against other constitutional rights, such as the right to human dignity and privacy
- 3 In this regard, an investigation should be conducted into:
  - the adequacy or otherwise of the prevailing self regulatory dispensation within the media;
  - whatever remedial measures may be required to safeguard and promote the rights of all South Africans;
  - the need or otherwise for a media tribunal to address these matters.
- 4 With regard to the important matter of transformation within the media, the Commission noted that the media industry is not covered by a sectoral Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Charter. It also noted that issues of media diversity in South Africa transcend issues of economic empowerment. Over the years, a number of media houses have concluded BEE transactions. These have not necessarily translated into a diversity of views. Some of the factors that account for this include the fact that readership, advertising profiles and key management positions remain largely the same.

### THE BATTLE OF IDEAS

- 5 The Commission noted that the ANC is faced with a major ideological offensive, largely driven by the opposition and individuals in the mainstream media.
- 6 A key objective of this offensive is the promotion of market fundamentalism to retain the old apartheid economic and social relations.
- 7 This offensive against our movement, in its content and form, is part of a global offensive against progressive

- values and ideas. The increasing concentration of ownership, control and content within the international media environment is reflected in the local industry.
- 8 The apparent lack of skills within the media to analyse and explain the complex social transformation through which South Africa is going is a challenge. The pursuit of profit means that owners do not readily invest in the development of journalism; they often rely on syndicated reports, grouping editorial content, etc. Commercial interests are thus increasingly impacting negatively on editorial quality. These and other related factors constitute the real threat to media freedom, diversity and democracy.
  - 9 Opportunities nevertheless exist for progressive voices, and the democratic movement in particular, to contest this space and the public discourse more broadly.
  - 10 The Commission therefore proposed that the ANC:
    - define the nature and scope of the battle of ideas and elaborate on the main competing ideological schools. It should vigorously propagate the ANC's outlook and values (developmental state, collective rights, values of caring and community solidarity, non sexism, etc) versus the current mainstream media's ideological outlook (neo-liberalism, a weak and passive state, and overemphasis on individual rights, market fundamentalism, etc.);
    - encourage a more representative and diverse media environment;
    - establish its own platforms for the production and distribution of information;
    - encourage the creation of progressive media houses, including media directed at youth;
    - strengthen government communication platforms;
    - improve its own internal and external communication tools and platforms. Specific suggestions on the use of new technology include: ANC internet TV, ANC blog, ANC News Site, sms communications, online political education, etc;
    - take practical steps to influence and engage the output of the creative, media, academic and intellectual communities;
    - improve the capacity of its communications cadres, including the resuscitation of media organising committees in each REC and committees at sub

branch level to coordinate and disseminate information to the people and engage in the battle of ideas;

- strengthen its interaction with journalists in all media;
- strengthen community media and ensure it has access to the latest available technologies, spectrum, etc;
- improve the capacity of the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) to support community media;
- address the quality of training of journalists together with other stakeholders such as the South African Newspaper Editors Forum (SANEF) and the Presidential Working Group on Higher Education; and,
- leverage government advertising power to support community media.

- 11 The Commission recommended that the NEC sub committee on Communications should establish a task team to investigate all these matters and report to the December National Conference.

#### PUBLIC BROADCASTER AND SIGNAL DISTRIBUTION

- 12 The Commission noted that alongside the commercial and community media is a strong public broadcaster on whom millions of our people daily depend for information, and which therefore has an important role to play in the deepening of democracy and involvement of the people in the process of social change.
- 13 The SABC is strategically placed to foster the principles of the Constitution, social cohesion, and nation-building, amongst others.
- 14 The ANC has previously taken resolutions on the funding of the public broadcaster, which have not been implemented. Its current funding model - where 80% of revenue comes from advertising, 18% from licence fees and only 2% from government - compromises its public service mandate.
- 15 The Commission recommends that the ANC should:
- reaffirm that government should substantially and urgently increase its funding of the public broadcaster to achieve a better balance between the different sources of funding;
  - through government, encourage the SABC to increase its support and promotion of local content that is consistent with the outlook of the country's Constitution, including a specific focus on women, the disabled and the youth;
  - reaffirm government's position that Sentech is a strategic asset and must remain in public hands, in order to guarantee the availability of TV signal to all parts of the country;
  - Ensure Sentech is adequately funded to ensure the

digitalisation of the infrastructure and access to broadband, especially for rural areas and public institutions.

#### FURTHER ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

- 16 Government should consider the existing international arrangements around internet domain name registration, particularly with respect to issues of availability and accountability.
- 17 Government should facilitate the roll-out of broadband, including to rural areas.
- 18 A political principle should be established to guide the allocation of spectrum - which is a national resource - to contribute to the promotion of national interests, development and diversity. This should involve increasing the amount of spectrum and licenses dedicated to community radio and TV.

#### OTHER ISSUES THAT WERE DISCUSSED BY THE COMMISSION INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

##### **Social cohesion:**

- 19 The media must be encouraged to foster and develop social cohesion . It should promote and support:
- the building of national consensus on a common set of values consistent with the new democratic order;
  - promote and support the development of national pride as a South African nation around events such as the hosting of 2010;
  - national unity among the various national groups in the country and support for the principles and values enshrined in our Constitution;
  - support the consolidation and deepening of democracy in South Africa.

##### **Disability:**

- 20 We reaffirm the principle that all media, especially the public broadcaster, should ensure access of people with disabilities to the media, both as producers and consumers of content.

##### **Gender:**

- 21 The ANC must continue to fight for space in the media to challenge patriarchy and gender stereotyping.

##### **Impact of advertising on youth and children**

- 22 We should investigate mechanisms to ameliorate the adverse social impact of advertising on children.

### **2010 and the media:**

- 23 Recognising sports as central in social cohesion and national building, we should ensure that
- 24 the media legacy of 2010 includes the development of digital broadcasting and broadband infrastructure rollout

### **Government communications and capacity:**

- 25 We must continuously attend to the capacity of government to communicate and thus empower the citizenry in a democratic state. This should include consideration of:
  - a legislative framework to establish a centralised government advertising unit which would enable government to utilise advertising spend economically;
  - the capacity of government communications and communicators;
  - the extent to which the prevailing administrative environment enables government to communicate effectively;
  - concrete development communications initiatives required for effective local government communication.

### **Media Diversity and Languages:**

- 26 We should ensure that citizens have access to media in all languages, and in particular support indigenous languages in print, TV and internet-based media. We should support content development and production in indigenous languages.