

Cwele agrees to consult SA media, oral hearing on PSB Bill

Media freedom took a step forward on 12 November 2010, when the Minister of State Security, Dr Siyabonga Cwele, gave his commitment to the South African National Editors' Forum ([SANEF](#)) at a meeting in Pretoria that the South African media will be consulted on the drafting of regulations that will detail the implementation of Protection of Information legislation once the law is finalised. This week, media will have an opportunity to make public comment on the draft Public Service Broadcasting Bill, 15-17 November.

Minister will take submissions forward

The minister said editors would be consulted on the drafting of the regulations to ensure that the law is not used to infringe on the work of media specifically.

The forum's delegation had earlier set out a number of concerns it still had with the Bill, including its view for the need to insert a public interest defence clause on the publication of classified information and the establishment of an independent review mechanism for the classification and adjudication of information.

The points raised were discussed in the two-hour meeting and the minister undertook to take the forum's reiterated concerns and submissions forward for discussion with government.

The meeting followed discussions between government and SANEF last month on government's interaction with media and media freedom as part of South Africa's constitutional democracy.

The minister gave SANEF the assurance that government viewed media as partners in building a modern democracy, "even though we compete for information. We need to build more synergy than see each other as opponents," Dr Cwele said.

He said the proposed legislation would be a law of general application, without specific conditions applying to the media, because government had no intention to muzzle media.

SANEF welcomed "softening" changes already made to the proposed legislation but argued that further checks and balances were required for the value of the changes made to date to be realised.

"The dialogue was constructive and we welcomed the minister's transparent attitude and understanding of the role of the media and its importance in our democracy," said Mary Papayya, SANEF deputy chair.

Oral hearings

The Draft Public Service Broadcasting Bill is an outcome of a thorough consultative process following the release of the Public Service Broadcasting Discussion Document in July 2009. The objectives of the Bill includes the following:

- to repeal the Broadcasting Act No. 4 of 1999, so as to align the broadcasting system to the developmental goals of the Republic;
- to promote universal access to broadcasting services by all South African citizens;
- to promote stability in the community broadcasting sector;
- and to establish a Public broadcasting Fund to fund the SABC, community broadcasters as well as local content production by independent producers.

The hearings will take place at Gallagher Convention Centre in Midrand, Johannesburg, from 8.30am to 4pm on 15-17

November 2010. Attendees should email Keitumetse Hlahlatsi at keitumetse@doc.gov.za or call the cell no +27 (0)82 922 3376

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