

Safrea denounces 'Internet Censorship Bill'

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The Southern African Freelancers' Association (Safrea) notes with concern the passing of the Films and Publications Amendment Bill, which authorises the Films and Publications Board to regulate online content, in Parliament on 6 March, 2018.

While Safrea applauds the bill's efforts to protect children from disturbing content, curb hate speech and address the scourge of fake news online, the detrimental effect it will have on freedom of expression in South Africa, if signed into law, cannot be ignored.

The Films and Publications Board will effectively have control of the internet, dictating what people can and cannot post. Everyone who generates some type of revenue from distributing content online will be required to register, pay a fee, and have their content approved and classified before it can be posted.

The bill's demand for pre-publication classification not only amounts to censorship, which is unconstitutional, but is also highly unreasonable and extremely difficult to enforce.

The broad terms, vague definitions and impractical requirements of this bill will not only affect media practitioners, but every single person who uses social media and the internet.

Even user-generated content, such as SnapChat, Facebook and YouTube videos, is included under the definition of 'film' and will require classification before publishing. Live streaming, which, by its very definition is posted in real-time, would become an unusable marketing tool. Furthermore whistle-blowing will become a democratic mechanism of the past.

There is a fine line between protection and censorship. Safrea believes that the Film and Publications Amendment Bill, in its current form, crosses that line irrevocably. We also believe the bill infringes on citizens' right to privacy.

As an association that advocates for and supports the rights of its members, all of whom are communications freelancers, Safrea appeals to provincial delegates to consider the many unsatisfactory aspects of this bill. We ask that the National Council of Provinces act in the best interests of South African citizens and protect our right to freedom of expression, which is enshrined in the Constitution.

About Safrea

Safrea is the Southern African Freelancers' Association. We advocate for and support freelance workers in the communications fields. We also provide resources, tools, training and networking to strengthen freelance careers.

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Safrea is the Southern African Freelancers Association. We provide advocacy, support and resources to freelancers in the media and communications industry, and provide tools, training and networking to freelance professionals.

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