

Scrap Secrecy Bill, defiant marchers tell SA govt



Bylssa Sikiti da Silva: @sikitimedia

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As the [Protection of Information Bill](#) (aka [Secrecy Bill](#)) is on the brink of putting South Africa at the same level with secretive societies such as China, North Korea and various African banana republics, the entire civil society - united under [Right2Know](#) - remains defiant in the face of repression. An estimated 800 protesters marched to the Constitution Hill in Johannesburg over the weekend to tell the ANC-led government: "stop and scrap it."



"We reject the bill in its current form and we have come here to say that no democracy can flourish under the veil of secrecy," Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) president Sdumo Dlamini told protestors gathered at Wits University in Braamfontein on Saturday, 13 August 2011.

[COSATU](#) is a partner in the ANC tripartite alliance, but the organisation has been very critical of vast seas of corruption currently streaming through certain government and ruling party's circles.

Create a culture of impunity

Critics worry that the proposed legislation will institutionalise and worsen corruption, and create a culture of impunity as perpetrators will certainly not be held accountable due to the 'unfair' classification of incriminating information.

Under the bill, corruption whistleblowers will be criminalised. And any media who publishes any classified information, or any ordinary citizen found in possession of any classified document, will be jailed for up to 25 years.

Media analysts say the legislation will curtail free reporting and almost kill investigative journalism - a shameful end for a country often labelled Africa's media freedom haven.

Challenge to all sectors of society

Former intelligence minister [Ronnie Kasrils](#) told protesters the bill was not only a challenge for the media, but to all sectors of society.

Wits University Prof [Franz Kruger](#) said limiting the flow of information will not transform the media, but extending the flow of information to citizens will help communities to be well-informed and be able to openly discuss the issues of the day. Other speakers included Nobel Prize Literature winner [Nadine Gordimer](#) and *Mail & Guardian* newspaper editor-in-chief [Nic Dawes](#).

But the SA government, which seems to be saying to its people that *dura lex sed lex* (the law is harsh but it is the law), shows no sign of listening to the masses and compromising on the repressive legislation, which the ANC-dominated ad-hoc parliamentary committee wants to finalise by 23 September this year.

Struggle only beginning

And on Saturday, angry and frustrated protesters stated clearly that their struggle against neo-repression and neo-apartheid policies was only beginning.

Carrying placards that read: "We have the right to know", "Free press = Free SA", "Speak now or be gagged forever", "No information means no accountability" and "25 years in jail for uncovering corruption", black, white and Indians - young and old - marched in the streets of Braamfontein in harmony. They sang revolutionary songs and mocked the government, sending a message of war and defiance to the Zuma administration and his ruling ANC.

Addressing protestors at the Constitution Hill, Right2Know coordinator [Siphiwe Segodi](#) said: "We are saying that, if this bill is not radically changed in order to address what needs to be addressed, we will be left with no choice but to take it here."

As he spoke, the Constitutional Court stood silent and reflective, waiting for D-Day, when it will serve as the ultimate platform to rule on the constitutionality of the contested legislation.

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- Google News Search: [Right2Know](#)
- Twitter Search: [right2know OR r2kcampaign OR #secrecybill OR "Secrecy Bill"](#)

ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA: @SIKITIMEDIA

Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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