



LAW SOCIETY
OF SOUTH AFRICA
PRESS RELEASE

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**LAW SOCIETY ALARMED AT DEVELOPMENTS AT STATE BROADCASTER;
SABC BOARD URGED TO CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH JOURNALISTS
CAN REPORT WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR**

Like an independent judiciary and an independent legal profession, a free press is a cornerstone of our constitutional democracy. The Law Society of South Africa (LSSA) is alarmed at developments at the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) over the past few weeks and yesterday's resignation of Acting CEO Jimi Matthews as his role at the SABC was impacting 'negatively on his moral judgment'. Senior and respected editors and journalists appear to be increasingly ventilating their concerns regarding the negative atmosphere in newsrooms.

The LSSA urges the SABC Board to act decisively to deal with apparent systemic problems and editorial policies that may have led the state broadcaster to the position it is in now. 'Broadcasters and journalists should report the news, not become the news or self-appointed censors. Once this happens it is simply a shame and contrary to the values of an open and democratic society,' say LSSA Co-Chairpersons Mvuso Notyesi and Jan van Rensburg.

They add: 'Members of the public are entitled to professional, objective and fair reporting. This can never be compromised, but especially more so during the period leading up to elections. It is not for a broadcaster – especially the national state broadcaster – to take upon itself a censorship role and decide what the public may or may not see or hear, and what journalists may or may not report.'

There are press codes that guide reporters, publishers and broadcasters, and if members of the public are dissatisfied with reporting, they have access to the self-regulating Press Council and the Office of the Press Ombud to settle disputes over the editorial content of broadcasts and publications. Ultimately there is also access to the courts. It is, therefore, of paramount importance that the SABC Board should endeavor to create an environment in which journalists can report to the general public without fear or favour.

ISSUED ON BEHALF OF THE CO-CHAIRPERSONS OF THE LAW SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA, MVUSO NOTYESI and JAN VAN RENSBURG

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Editor's note:

The Law Society of South Africa brings together its six constituent members – the Cape Law Society, the KwaZulu-Natal Law Society, the Law Society of the Free State, the Law Society of the Northern Provinces, the Black Lawyers Association and the National Association of Democratic Lawyers – in representing South Africa's 24 300 attorneys and 5 000 candidate attorneys.