



The newly elected Sanef executive.

Sanef sets the agenda



Mike Siluma
Chairperson of
Sanef

Sanef is an imperative. Basically we do not have a choice in terms of our role during the transformation period and beyond.

One of the main weaknesses in South African journalism is that there is no credible voice. Some of the loudest voices are white and they are discredited. Black journalists have views but no clout. There is no debate going on and therefore a vacuum.

It is imperative for us to develop the capacity to make interventions on behalf of editors and media as a whole in South Africa, otherwise others – for example government – will move into the vacuum.

It is imperative for us to set the agenda on training, ethics and the role journalists should play in our country. We must get to a position where we discuss things with other stakeholders and don't just react.

And there are other issues: the standard of journalism is generally low and affects the ability of us all to act as credible interpreters. Every story in which there is inaccuracy reflects on how well we do. Generally, the criticisms of the standards of journalism are valid. Training must be a priority for us.

On transformation: it should be the duty of the media in this country to force debate. But we can't be autocratic: we must reach consensus on the role of the media in transformation. This goes beyond changing structures into changing how journalists think.

Regarding the government: our attitude must be different now that we have a legitimate government. We journalists must acknowledge its right to be heard too.

We, the delegates

at the launch conference of the SA National Editors' Forum, having noted President Nelson Mandela's remarks at the ANC's 50th conference as well as other criticism of South African media:

- remain committed to transforming our industry to represent fully the communities we serve;
- we reaffirm that South Africa's new Constitution has granted us an historic role to be the critical watchdogs, especially over those who wield power in our society. This is a responsibility which we will never shirk.

To this end we bind ourselves to:

- leading the debate on the issues affecting our industry and society as a whole;
- developing and defending the integrity and credibility of our industry and profession;
- forging links with like-minded groups in South Africa, our continent and across the world;
- representing the profession on legislative and restrictive issues;
- striving for professional excellence;
- embarking on a recruitment drive to ensure we represent the full spectrum of our segment of the industry.

Key resolutions

Media Freedom and Ethics

The Media Freedom committee of the Council is to seek with urgency the co-operation of other stakeholders such as the SAUJ, Mwasa, FXI, etc. to jointly:

- Approach government and political parties about laws restricting media freedom and election coverage.
- Plan a media freedom campaign which could include roadshows in the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng and Western Cape.
- Facilitate coverage of media freedom issues.
- Swiftly respond to journalists under threat from whatever source.
- Liaise with regional bodies such as Misa.
- Give input on behalf of Sanef on all proposed new legislation such as the broadcasting Green Paper, the Marriage Act and the Open Democracy Bill.

2 Sanef condemns media restrictions in the SADC countries, including the proposed licensing of journalists in Swaziland and Botswana, and asks our government to pressurise those governments to lift such restrictions.

3 Section 205: Sanef is to obtain the services of a legal adviser to pull together and simplify the legal opinions about why journalists should have a "just cause" defence. A concrete proposal can then be presented to the President.

4 Re: the Western Cape Attorney General Frank Khan's summons to Cape photographers to give evidence in their personal capacity as witnesses to the Staggie murder: Sanef regards this as unjust and an attempt to get around the problems with section 205, and calls for the withdrawal of the summons. Journalists cannot be expected to give evidence that can place their lives at risk.

5 Urgent attention should be given to legislation restricting freedom of expression which is in conflict with the Constitution and has no place in a democracy. Pleas made by various bodies during the past eight years have not yet been acted on. Sanef stresses this matter needs urgent attention.

6 Sanef welcomes the creation of the office of Press Ombudsman which gives the public free access to an independent arbiter for the speedy resolution of disputes and helps journalists maintain high ethical standards. Sanef encourages all editors regularly to publicise the office and its role and to promote an appreciation of codes of conduct among staff and the public. Sanef supports the code of conduct of the Press Ombudsman and will facilitate, with the IBA and Broadcasting Complaints Commission, the creation of one common code of principles.

Diversity

There is a need for an independent agency funded by the government and publishers to serve small radio and print media; to facili-

tate black empowerment and in particular to assist small media in rural areas.

In the interim the National Community Media Forum and the IMDT (Independent Media Diversity Trust) should facilitate skills transfer between Sanef members and small media. Sanef proposes that:

1 There should be tax incentives to donors and tax relief for small media.

2 Sanef shall assist small emerging media with guidelines on ethics and other aspects – without taking them over – and will monitor the emergence of new media to provide a helping hand and ensure their long term survival.

3 There should be print subsidies for small newspapers, and alternative marketing and sales and distribution systems set up to assist their development and growth.

4 Mainstream media groups are urged to support developing news agencies.

5 Sanef should monitor the media unbundling processes to establish the extent to which they result in real black empowerment; and also monitor policies and practices concerning gender, disability and training.

Corrective Action and Training

1 Sanef should lobby editors and journalism educators to use their influence to accelerate media transformation to ensure that the demographics of South Africa is reflected in both staff and training.

2 This process must include the challenges of changing attitudes, editorial direction and content.

3 Sanef should lobby to compile a consolidated policy on the implementation of corrective action and will arrange a workshop on this before July 1998.

4 An urgent workshop needs to be held with journalism educators concerning the National Qualifications Framework and the setting of standards.

5 Sanef should play a more active role in advisory bodies.

6 Sanef should lobby donors and media houses and other organisations to fund research into journalism and raise awareness of the role of the media in a democratic society.

7 Training and education should not only include technical skills but also awareness about class, rural/urban contexts, gender and other contextualised and researched issues.

8 A survey of media training budgets should be done and the results publicised.



Peter Sullivan and Sarah Crowe



Judy Sandison



Phil Molefe, Mike Siluma, Sipho Ngcobo and John Battersby.



Gavin Stewart and Jane Raphaely



Ryland Fisher



Mathata Tsedu, Tyrone August and Nazeem Howa

The newly elected executive

Chairperson: Sowetan Editor Mike Siluma

Deputy Chairperson: Cape Argus Editor Moegsien Williams

Secretary-General: SABC Radio News Regional Editor (KwaZulu-Natal) Judy Sandison

The other 17 members elected to the 20-member council are: Mary Papayya (East Coast Radio); Siphwe Magoda (SABC Radio PE); Sarah Crowe (SABC TV); Phil Molefe (SABC TV); Isak Minnaar (SABC TV); Guy Berger (Rhodes University); Arrie de Beer (Potchefstroom University); Raymond Louw (SA Report); Ebbe Dommissie (Die Burger); Tim du Plessis (Beeld); Anthea Garman (Rhodes University); Wendy Morgenrood (Readers Digest); John Battersby (Sunday Independent); Sipho Ngcobo (Business Report); Mathata Tsedu (Sowetan); Lebona Mosia (Technikon Northern Gauteng) and Mike Loewe (ECN).