Launch event for 'Practical Guide to Media Law'

The launch event for 'Practical Guide to Media Law' took place yesterday, 4 March 2014 at Webber Wentzel Attorneys, authors of the new publication.

Published by LexisNexis South Africa, it provides an update on the legal restrictions and protections that fall under the umbrella of media law in South Africa.

Media and information attorneys

It is funded by non-profit and non-governmental organisation Section 16, in collaboration with the Open Society Foundation for South Africa (OSF-SA).

The authors are media and information attorneys and Webber Wentzel partners, Dario Milo and Pamela Stein, who have represented major corporations, newspapers, broadcasters and entertainment companies in some of the country's seminal media law cases.

Pamela Stein

For instance, Milo acted on behalf of cartoonist Jonathan Shapiro (Zapiro) in the defamation lawsuit lodged against him by President Jacob Zuma for the "Lady Justice" cartoon and acts for the media in advising on the Protection of State Information Bill. He recently acted for broadcasters in a successful application for permission to broadcast the Oscar Pistorius criminal trial. Stein's main areas of practice are data protection and privacy, employment law and media law and she has acted for some of South Africa's leading publications and television broadcasters in litigation related to defamation, privacy and freedom of expression.

Despite media law being a vast subject, covering areas of common law and statute, including civil and criminal law, constitutional law and the law of delict, the authors, with their team of assistants, have produced a book that avoids the laborious detail of many legal textbooks. It is written in simple English and uses clear examples to illustrate the legal rules.

Valuable to media profession

The book's preface states, "The area of law we describe in this book applies to both old and new media and indeed the publication of statements by any means, whether print, television, e-mail, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, or carrier pigeon."

The publication is therefore of value to all those whose professions involve publishing information and ideas including journalists, editors, producers, broadcasters, bloggers, distributors and advertisers, as well as lawyers and students of law and journalism.

Dario Milo

It states the law as at 30 September 2013 and covers some of last year's landmark developments pertinent to media law. These include President Zuma referring the Protection of State Information Bill back to Parliament in September and the overturning of a ban on media access in Refugee Appeal Board matters in the case involving Radovan Krejcir that same month.

Be aware of the law

Former Constitutional Court Justice, Kate O' Regan, writes in the foreword, "They have covered the issues of greatest importance to the media: freedom of speech; freedom of information; the principle of open justice; issues relating to defamation; and the protection of sources, as well as the role of the regulators, both public and private.

sponsibilities that must accompany the right to a free media is the duty upon the media to be aware of the law. This book will play an important role in making the law regulating the media accessible to journalists, editors and all those engaged in the dissemination of information in society - a group that has grown exponentially in recent years with the growth of the Internet."

LexisNexis South Africa CEO, Billy Last, agrees, "A transparent legal system is a fundamental necessity for the rule of law and the media need to understand the laws that govern them in order to fulfil the ideals of media freedom extolled by Nelson Mandela in his speech to the International Press Institute Congress in 1994. This authoritative publication encourages the notion of a free and informed press that can act in the public interest without fear or favour."

The book is available through the website www.lexisnexis.co.za/store/za at a cost of R513.00.

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