

Dismay over Namibian TV censorship

Namibian television viewers and the political opposition are strongly protesting a move by President Sam Nujoma to ban the screening of foreign TV shows featuring sex and violence.

Last Monday President Sam Nujoma instructed the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) to stop airing foreign films, soap operas and series "that have a bad influence on the youth" and instead show productions that depict Namibia "in a positive light", such as wildlife programmes.

One of the first programmes to be pulled was Monday night's episode of "Dune", a science fiction series based on Frank Herbert's award-winning book. In its place the NBC flighted a re-broadcast of ruling party SWAPO's August congress. According to an AFP correspondent "The Bold and the Beautiful was axed from its afternoon slot but had to be aired on Wednesday after complaints from viewers. Since Monday, viewers have been faced with children's programmes, a smattering of soaps, news, local language programmes and a feed to CNN.

Namibia's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has defended the president's decision, saying Nujoma's actions were those "of a responsible father." But Namibia's opposition Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) has reacted strongly and expressed their dismay at the "autocratic manner in which President Nujoma is running the NBC".

In late August Nujoma took on the post as Minister of Information and Broadcasting in addition to his presidential duties in an apparent attempt at resolving financial problems being experienced by the broadcaster and to discipline its employees.

A Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) member who worked for the organisation's media monitoring project says that since Nujoma took over the portfolio the national broadcaster has given much more time to his speeches and SWAPO-related issues. The member, speaking on condition of anonymity, says that in the past week's news bulletins Nujoma has featured in at least five of the leads and once in a second lead.

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting released a statement on Wednesday that defended the president, saying that his actions were "that of a responsible father".