

Talking about racism in the newsroom

The racially motivated incidences making headlines recently lead to the South African Human Rights Commission meeting with the Johannesburg Press Club yesterday, Tuesday, 11 March 2008, to discuss the progress made and challenges faced by South Africa.

By [Tshepiso Seopa](#) 12 Mar 2008

The exclusive off-the-record meeting by members of the newly revived Forum of Black Journalists (FBJ) with the president of the ANC, the racist video made by students of the University of the Free State, and journalists being beaten up in Bloemfontein in what it is believed to have been a racial attack are just some of the recent incidents reported in the news.

The chairperson of the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), Jody Kollapen, addressed the meeting, saying that racism is alive and well in SA. "We continue to be defined by our blackness and whiteness. I don't think as South Africans we talk about racism as we should. The lessons we can learn from the last two or three weeks is that racism is alive and well in SA.

"My own view was that the reconciliation process was at the expense of transformation; we had romantic views about reconciliation. I have also argued that and I will continue to argue that in terms of transformation hardly anything was asked of white South Africans. White South Africans were not really given the opportunity to engage with what happened in the past."

Focused "unduly"

He said the Truth and Reconciliation Commission focused "unduly" on the "excesses" of apartheid; it never really began a conversation between ordinary South Africans.

"What the TRC didn't do is to begin a conversation between you and me... we never spoke, we never spoke about what apartheid meant for you and what it meant for me. On the one hand is the sense that we continue to be divided by our blackness and our whiteness.

"I think the challenge is to transcend the sense that we have over our blackness and our whiteness... I think it requires hard work and I think it requires ordinary people to speak to each other."

Speaking about the FBJ meeting, Kollapen said the objective of an organisation would not necessarily have to be reflected by its membership – he also encouraged dialogue on issues of racism in the newsrooms.

The SAHRC is expected to release a report on the situation next week.

ABOUT TSHEPISO SEOPA

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