

Goodbye Snuki: SABC board announces changes

BREAKING NEWS: The contract of Snuki Zikalala, SABC head of news and current affairs, will not be renewed when it expires at the end of April 2009, several international news bureaux will be closed down and the number of board committees will be reduced, the SABC board announced in a press statement today, Tuesday, 28 April 2009, shortly after midday.



Veteran journalist Phil Molefe will act as head of news and current affairs with effect from 1 May while the board embarks on a "thorough" search for Zikalala's replacement. The decision follows a special board meeting held in Johannesburg on Saturday 25 April.

Kanyi Mkonza, chairperson of the SABC board, who announced several changes to bring about stability to the organisation, said, "The board acknowledges the leadership and vision provided by Dr Zikalala in establishing SABC News as an international brand. He surfed through difficult waters and yet remained committed to building SABC News. He was the overall leader of our news team during the last two election periods. His sterling contribution has, once again, been given a stamp of approval by Media Monitoring Africa which hailed our election coverage for its fair and balanced reporting."

The board, however, felt that it was time to hand over the baton to someone who can bring fresh ideas to the broadcaster. It intends to appoint someone with relevant skill and expertise to take its complex news operation forward.

Closure of news bureaux

Some of the changes within the news division include the closure of, at least, three news bureaux: Jamaica, Kinshasa and reducing the US bureaux to two. "We are encouraged by the decision to reduce the bureau[x]; however, we continue to urge management to take effective steps to increase efficiencies across the entire news-value chain, including the regions and the remaining foreign operations," Bheki Khumalo, chairperson of the News Committee said.

The board also decided to review the appointment of the COO and accordingly referred the matter back to the Acting Minister of Communications, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang. According to the press statement, this is done in order to ensure that the minister "applies her mind to the original recommendation of the previous board". The board believes that this will assist in finalising the appointment of the COO for the SABC - a position that has been vacant since 2007.

In the meantime, the board will continue its search for a suitable candidate for the group CEO (Dali Mpofu's former position) a decision which he has been contesting vigorously) with the advert extended till end of May.

In order to continue with the process of improving efficiencies within the corporation, the board has taken a decision to reduce the committees of the board to six. These will be able to accommodate all business units and activities of the organisation. These committees include the legislated content committees such as: Public Broadcasting Services and New Public Commercial Services; Audit and Risk; Finance, Investment and Procurement; Governance, Nominations and Remuneration as well as Group Executive Committee (at an operational level).

The board also established the Ad Hoc Committee on the 2010 FIFA World Cup. This will be buttressed by an additional committee to give more focus to the digital terrestrial television (DTT) issues.

Concerned about finances

The press statement continues that the board remains concerned about the state of corporation's finances and is intending work around the clock to ensure that the Turnaround Strategy announced a few weeks ago bears some fruit. Accordingly, the board received a briefing from CFO Rob Nicholson, about the state of finances. "We continue to monitor this on an ongoing basis with a view to returning the organisation to a healthy financial position," Mkonza said.

The board also noted that it has taken exception and condemned unreservedly the actions of some SABC members who "unjustifiably leak information about the organisation to the media".

"The *Sunday Independent*, in particular, has become a convenient outlet for these elements, though it is fully within its right to publish what it wishes, within the law," reads the statement.

"We have requested internal audit to conduct a thorough investigation and even to refer these misdemeanors on the part of SABC members to relevant law enforcement authorities. These leaks, indulged in recklessly and often feeding false material, damage the reputation of individuals as well as that of the SABC. The leaks run counter to the collegiate and collective spirit of an organisation such as the SABC, and endanger stability."

The statement also stressed that the board is determined to bring fundamental stability to the public broadcaster, concluding with Mkonza saying: "The Board believes that the bold steps we have announced today marks the initial steps of the long and arduous journey towards establishing a stable public broadcaster of the highest quality to serve our country's hard earned democracy."

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