

Radio censorship rules released

According to reports, radio in Swaziland is to be banned from broadcasting news and information that does not support the government's own agenda. All radio stations in the region, except one Christian station that does not broadcast news, is state-controlled and already suffers from high levels of censorship.

In the lead up to the national elections next year, the government has barred all coverage of events, 'except those authorised by relevant authorities'. New guidelines recently released, also bar 'public service announcements' unless they are 'in line with government policy' or have been authorised 'by the chiefs through the regional administrators' or deputy prime minister's office'.

The guidelines say the radio stations, which fall under the control of the Swaziland Broadcasting and Information Service (SBIS), cannot be 'used for purposes of campaigning by individuals or groups, or to advance an agenda for political, financial popularity gains for individuals or groups'.

Media in Swaziland already suffer severe censorship. There are only two TV stations, the state-controlled Swazi TV and the independent Channel S, which has a publicly-stated policy of supporting King Mswati III, who rules the country.

There are only two national newspaper groups in Swaziland: the *Swazi Observer*, is in effect owned by the king and the other, the *Times of Swaziland*, censors itself heavily so as to avoid anything that might be interpreted as critical of the king.

There is a long history of censorship on SBIS. Strikes and anti-government demonstrations are usually ignored by the radio. Sometimes live programmes are censored on air. In July 2011, the plug was pulled on a phone-in programme when listeners started criticising the government for its handling of the economy. Percy Simelane, who was then the boss of SBIS, and is now the government's official spokesperson, personally stormed the radio studio and cut the programme.

In April 2011, Welile Dlamini, a long-time news editor at SBIS, challenged prime minister Barnabas Dlamini at an editors' forum meeting on why the state radio station was told by the government what and what not to broadcast. Dlamini said that the station they were instructed to spike certain stories such as those about demonstrations by progressives and strike action by workers. The PM responded by saying editors should resign if they were not happy with the editorial policies they are expected to work with.

In March 2011, SBIS stopped broadcasting the BBC World Service Focus on Africa programme after it carried reports critical of King Mswati III. In the same month, SBIS failed to cover the march by nurses that forced the Swazi Government into paying them overdue allowances.

In 2010, Swazi police told SBIS it must stop allowing people to broadcast information about future meetings unless the police had given permission. Jerome Dlamini, Deputy Director of the Swaziland Broadcasting and Information Services (SBIS), said this was to stop the radio station airing an announcement for a meeting that was prohibited.

He said, 'It's the station's policy not to make announcements without police permission.' The police directive came to light when the Swaziland National Association of Teachers (SNAT) tried to get an announcement aired about one of its meetings.

Source: [MediaSourceAfrica](#)