

SANEF condemns charges laid against Sunday Times by Sekunjalo Investments

Responding to the criminal charges laid against the Sunday Times, its editor Phylcia Oppelt and journalist Bobby Jordan by Sekunjalo Investments, the South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef) has strongly condemned the decision and urges Sekunjalo and its executive chairperson, Dr Iqbal Survé, to reconsider its decision.



The charges come after Jordan wrote a story for the Sunday Times, reporting on the Public Protector's provisional report involving a tender in the department of agriculture, forestry and fisheries. The report reflects negatively on Sekunjalo. Sekunjalo Investments is an associate company of Sekunjalo Holdings, a private company that led the consortium that bought Independent Newspapers.

Sanef states it is concerned that the laying of criminal charges against journalists for doing their work might send the wrong message to employees of titles in the Independent Group. Sekunjalo has other complaint mechanisms available to it, including lodging a complaint against the Sunday Times with the Press Ombudsman.

A real risk

It is alarmed that Sekunjalo is seriously undermining the strong opposition that Sanef has raised against the Protection of State Information Bill by laying this charge. Sekunjalo is also contradicting the Declaration of Table Mountain, which condemns the criminalising of reporting. Previous editors of the Independent Group have supported the declaration through their membership of Sanef, which adopted the declaration some years ago.

It is unfortunate that while the industry is fighting against the potential criminalisation of information dissemination, as provided for in the Protection of State Information Bill, it is faced with this kind of action from a company that should be the new ally in the ongoing attempts to maintain a free press in our country.

There is a real risk that the legal action by Sekunjalo could harm investigative journalism and freedom of speech, thus reducing journalists to disseminators of so-called authorised information.