

Hlaudi Motsoeneng is just a glorified PR officer, SABC tells court

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The SABC on Thursday downplayed Hlaudi Motsoeneng's influence at the public broadcaster, saying his position as group executive of corporate affairs was equivalent to that of a "glorified public relations officer".



Image via SA Breaking News

The High Court in Cape Town was hearing an application brought by the DA to have Motsoeneng removed from the SABC. He was recently reappointed to the position of group executive of corporate affairs, the post he held before becoming chief operating officer.

The DA's application lists the SABC as the second respondent. The public broadcaster's lawyer, Stephan du Toit, argued that it was not for the courts to dictate to the SABC who it could employ.

He said SABC acting CEO James Aguma was entitled to allocate the portfolio to any SABC employee.

"Him [Motsoeneng] holding that position is really a business decision taken by the CEO. He [Motsoeneng] is a glorified public relations officer; [this] is not a defining role as he had as chief operating officer, he now has a subordinate role," Du Toit said.

Motsoeneng was reappointed to the position after he lost his job as operations chief in September when the Supreme Court of Appeal dismissed his application for leave to appeal against a ruling by the High Court in Cape Town, setting aside his permanent appointment as the operations chief.

His reappointment as an executive precipitated the resignation of two board members in Parliament in October.

The board has just one member left and Parliament is due to hold an inquiry to look into the crisis at the SABC later in November.

The DA argued on Thursday that Motsoeneng is an "unethical, manipulative fraudster who has destroyed any semblance of good corporate governance at the SABC", and should therefore not hold any influential position.

"The DA trying to prescribe to the SABC who they may employ, it will set a bad precedent if a political party comes along and tells us who to employ," said Du Toit.

Anton Katz for the DA argued in court that Motsoeneng was a "toxic cancer that needs to be cut from the body [of the SABC]".

He said Motsoeneng was still very much an influential figure at the SABC even though he held a different position. Motsoeneng was still in the same physical office as when he was chief operating officer, said Katz.

The office of the public protector argued in court that Motsoeneng should not hold any position of influence that requires honesty and integrity at the SABC because he was found to have been dishonest.

Motsoeneng's legal troubles stem from former public protector Thuli Madonsela's findings against him in 2014.

In her report, *When Governance and Ethics Fail*, Madonsela found Motsoeneng had fabricated his matric qualification and had increased his salary irregularly, from R1.5m to R2.4m in one year.

A disciplinary hearing cleared Motsoeneng of wrongdoing, but the DA says the process was a "sham and a charade".

The disciplinary inquiry was one of the remedial actions directed by Madonsela in her report.

The SABC is challenging the public protector's report and further argues that it will be premature for the courts to make a decision on Motsoeneng's future until its review application has been dealt with.

The case continues.

Source: Business Day