

Prophet cartoon a bad call, says Dawes

Publishing a cartoon depicting the Muslim Prophet Mohammed by the *Mail & Guardian* was a bad editorial decision, although the courts allowed it, former editor of the newspaper Nic Dawes said at the weekend.



Nic Dawes: Would have done it differently today. (Image: *Mail & Guardian*)

He was speaking at a panel discussion on satire in the media during the Menell Media Exchange in Johannesburg.

Speaking about the controversial cartoon of the prophet by Jonathan Shapiro (Zapiro), published in 2010, he said "as a matter of editorial process" it was not appropriate to publish it.

"I would have done [it] a lot differently. I was new on the job and could have done it in a more considerate way," Dawes said. "Clearing the publishing of the cartoon didn't necessarily mean it was the correct thing to do."

He said in a society such as SA it was easy to view satire in a racial slant, such as the Dr Jack & Curtis cartoon where members of the public could have misconstrued the depiction of clowns as a reference to Negro minstrels.

The panel, which included *Eye Witness News* senior political correspondent Stephen Grootes and stand-up comedian Loyiso Gola, talked about satire in South African politics.

The depiction of Cabinet ministers and voters as clowns by Dr Jack in a cartoon published by the *Eye Witness News* website was the latest work of satire that prompted a reaction from the African National Congress (ANC).

Brett Murray's painting depicting President Jacob Zuma with his genitalia exposed - also known as The Spear - set the ANC on a collision course with the *City Press* after the newspaper published the image of the painting in 2012.

The newspaper removed the image from its website.

Grootes said the political storm surrounding that cartoon was an example of "taking your eyes off the big picture", where the controversy distracted the public from the point the cartoon was trying to make. "We didn't pull it because of political pressure. We apologised to our audience before the ANC spoke out about the cartoon. We felt that we did the wrong thing," Grootes said.

Source: *Business Day*, via I-Net Bridge