

Sanef slams prisons officers' treatment of journalists

The SA National Editors' Forum (Sanef) says it condemns in the strongest terms the detention of journalists and photographers by Correctional Services officers while on an official visit to the Groenpunt Maximum Security Correctional Centre in the Free State, the site of a violent demonstration by prisoners a week earlier. The parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Correctional Services arranged the official tour of the prison by the media.



According to Sanef, during the visit, journalists from *The Star* and the *Sowetan*, among others, who had been invited to tour the facility by the parliamentary committee, were surrounded by armed warders, who ordered them out of their cars. The Correctional Services officials took away the journalists' cameras, memory cards, cellphones and deleted pictures themselves. According to the Sanef statement, "The journalists were held for an hour and described their treatment as 'humiliating and terrifying'. They said they had 'co-operated under duress'."

According to Sanef, upon their arrival at the prison, the journalists witnessed a commotion with warders donning bulletproof vests and taking up shields. They took pictures when they saw a group of warders assaulting a prisoner dressed in an orange garb. They said they saw him being brutally beaten as he was pushed from warder to warder. "After the prisoner was taken away, according to a reporter, 'they came for us', subjecting the journalists to an 'hour-long traumatic experience'."

Sanef says that according to the journalists, the officials erased not only the pictures of the prisoner being beaten up but other pictures that had nothing to do with the Groenpunt visit.

Journalists should have been afforded the same protection as that given to the MPs

Sanef says in its statement that it "believes that the deletion of photographs was an attempt to destroy evidence and merits charges of defeating the ends of justice against those responsible.

"The journalists were engaged in carrying out their professional duties on an officially sanctioned assignment and as such were required to be protected from interference and possible harm by the Correctional Services officials and the parliamentarians on the portfolio committee. Indeed the committee was seriously at fault for leaving the scene when the journalists were detained instead of interceding and protecting them. Having been invited by the committee the journalists should have been accorded the same immunity from interference as that to which the parliamentarians were entitled."

Sanef says it will request the presiding officers of Parliament to investigate the incident and to adopt mechanisms that ensure that journalists are fully protected when covering oversight work by MPs and will seek a meeting with National Assembly speaker Max Sisulu and NCOP chairman Mninwa Mahlangu.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>