

Media tribunal unlikely: Press Council

It is unlikely that the ANC's proposed media appeals tribunal will go ahead, director in the Press Council Joe Thloloe says.



"I think the [ANC] realises an attempt to have a media appeals tribunal will turn into a battle in the Constitutional Court," Thloloe said yesterday.

However, the Parliament's inquiry into the matter would continue because the party had to carry out its resolutions.

Thloloe said the Press Council had already told the chair of Parliament's portfolio committee on communications it would be happy to make a presentation to it.

The African National Congress resolved at its national conference in Mangaung in December that Parliament had to continue to conduct an inquiry into the feasibility of the tribunal.

It said this needed to be done within the framework of the country's Constitution.

"The ANC remains committed to a media climate that is free from vested political and commercial interests," the party said in its resolution.

"The envisaged parliamentary process should:

- Reinforce the South African Constitution Act 108 of 1996;
- Review the existing media accountability mechanisms;
- Balance the individual's rights to dignity and freedom of expression and freedom of the media;
- Review the privacy laws as well as those dealing with libel and defamation."

Largely satisfied with PFC suggestions

At the party's conference in Polokwane in 2007, the ANC decided it would investigate setting up a media appeals tribunal because it was unhappy with the state of the media and its level of transformation.

At its policy conference in June 2012, the ANC said it was largely satisfied with suggestions made by the Press Freedom Commission (PFC) to improve accountability in the print media.

The PFC recommends greater public participation in a system of independent co-regulation between the public and press, without state or government involvement.

This came out of a series of hearings led by former chief justice Pius Langa.

The PFC recommends the introduction of a hierarchy of fines, depending on the infraction and the publication's response to a complaint.

Repeated non-compliance with the rulings of the adjudicatory system could lead to suspension or even expulsion from the Press Council of SA.

ANC wants more done to encourage media diversity

The ANC resolved that the recommendations from the PFC should be included in the parliamentary inquiry.

"South Africans must enjoy the freedom of expression in the context of a diverse media environment that is reflective of their situations and daily experiences," the party said.

In the resolutions the ANC said more needed to be done to encourage media diversity.

An economic empowerment charter to promote broad-based black economic empowerment in the sector needed to be introduced.

"Among other things, the charter should address the availability of print media in the languages South Africans speak and communicate with."

The Media Development and Diversity Agency needed to be strengthened so it could support more community and commercial entities.

The ANC also resolved that the Competition Commission should focus on anti-competitive practices in the sector.

Advertising industry needs to be transformed

The advertising industry needed to be transformed to ensure it contributed to media diversity.

The Competition Commission is currently probing suspected anti-competitive behaviour by Caxton, Naspers, Times Media Group, and Independent Newspapers.

Caxton reportedly pulled out of the task team because its work overlapped with that of the Competition Commission.

The other three print media companies decided to continue participating, but had asked for a postponement to the end of February to allow for full consultation with their lawyers.

The hearing continued with other parties involved.

A new task team looking into media transformation, the first of its kind, was introduced in September last year.

The Print and Digital Media Transformation Task Team intended to help the media industry develop a common strategy for transformation. The task team was expected to finish its work in April.

Spokeswoman Neo Bodibe said the team hoped to finish by this date.

Source: *Sapa*, via I-Net Bridge

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