

Union wants SABC news head suspended over assault claim

Pressure is mounting on the SABC to suspend its head of news, Jimi Matthews, following allegations that he assaulted a staff member...



Jimi Matthews. (Image extracted from the SABC website)

Matthews appeared before a grievance hearing on Tuesday to answer allegations that he assaulted a female colleague during the broadcast of President Jacob Zuma's state of the nation address in Cape Town in February.

A staff union, the Media Workers Association of South Africa, this week called on the SABC to suspend Matthews during the "grievance procedure".

Matthews is accused of assaulting a female TV technician during an argument over the brief loss of the live feed.

Unaware that the technical glitch was caused by the use of a jamming device by the police and parliamentary staff, Matthews is said to have blamed the broadcaster's technician.

Call to take action against Matthews

Union general secretary Tuwani Gumani wrote to the public broadcaster's senior management, copying chief operating officer Hlaudi Motsoeneng and Communications Minister Faith Muthambi, to call for action to be taken against Matthews.

"The identified assailant, like others before him found to have acted in a similar manner, must not be protected as we know is the case as evidence will show, but he must be purged from the SABC, a public service organisation operating in our

open, democratic and constitutional dispensation," wrote Gumani.

"Our understanding is that there was verbal, psychological and physical assault perpetrated by a powerful male on a female employee."

'No hesitation' in previous case involving a similar offence

Gumani told the *Sunday Times* that the SABC had not hesitated to act against former journalist Themba Makeleni, who was fired for committing a similar offence in 2012.

Tuesday's proceedings did not last long because witnesses were not available. The hearing was postponed to 21 April.

The SABC confirmed that a formal grievance was lodged on 19 February 2015, seven days after the alleged incident.

However, said spokesman Kaizer Kganyago, "it must also be noted" that the grievance was lodged a few hours after the employee was told of impending disciplinary action against her.

He said: "The SABC takes all grievances, including cases of women abuse, seriously.

"We are doing all that needs to be done to deal with this matter and the disciplinary action against the said official who lodged a complaint against Mr Matthews."

He said neither of the two staff members had been suspended. It was surprising that the union was calling for Matthews, but not the female staff member, to be suspended pending the outcome of the disciplinary process, he said.

Source: *Sunday Times*, via I-Net Bridge

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