

## SA at boiling point as Secrecy Bill fever mounts

Post-apartheid South Africa has entered one of the most boiling periods of its history, as journalists, businesses, politicians, non-governmental organisations, trade unionists, academics and ordinary citizens have formed a 'one love, one heart' bloc to stop the Protection of Information Bill - aka Secrecy Bill - from being enacted in its current form. But, will the ruling ANC hear the cry of its children?

 By [Bylssa Sikiti da Silva](#) 9 Jun 2011

Critics firmly believe the Secrecy Bill will compromise transparency and service delivery, institutionalise state corruption, hamper foreign investment and access to information, and put a dent on free reporting and investigative journalism.

In brief, there is a general impression that the current form of this proposed legislation - ambiguous, unconstitutional and abusive - will hurt democracy, a sacrosanct right gained at the barrel of violence, division, hate, blood, tears and sweat.

### Activists working hard

As the ANC-led ad-hoc parliamentary committee is busy cooking its last storm to have the bill enacted, activists are simultaneously working hard to launch a major counter-offensive to keep the 'war' going - a 'war' they believe is justified, given the state's threat to unnecessarily classify information and curtail fundamental freedoms.

Apart from the [Right2Know petition](#), an international organisation called [Avaaz](#) is urging the public to sign an [online petition](#) and forward it to the next person via email or social media, as it aims to reach 50 000 signatures that will be delivered to Parliament, the executive and key international allies.

In the meantime, the Southern African Freelancers' Association (SAFREA) in the Western Cape has this week added its voice to protest against the proposed Secrecy Bill, saying it was greatly concerned about the state's renewed intentions to forge ahead with it, despite widespread opposition by various professional and civil society groupings in SA and abroad.

"The concerns of our members are shared by many right-thinking South Africans who can see through government's intentions to prevent the media, whistleblowers and ordinary members of society from gaining access to information of public interest," SAFREA regional spokesperson Solly Moeng said.

### Shield possible abuse from public scrutiny

Moeng pointed out that this information might be in danger of being classified by unscrupulous officials in order to shield possible abuse of resources and positions from public scrutiny.

As opposition to the proposed bill gains momentum, the Right2Know (R2K) Campaign said the next couple of weeks will be crucial as the ad-hoc committee dealing with the bill has set an August 2011 deadline to finalise it.

The following individuals and organisations, among others, have in recent days reiterated their hostility towards the proposed bill's current form:

- Former intelligence minister Ronnie Kasrils
- ANC alliance partner COSATU
- Municipal workers' union SAMWU, FEDUSA and TAC/Section 27
- Council for the Advancement of the Constitution (CASAC), the Helen Suzman Foundation and Muslim Judicial Council,
- The National Press Club, SANEF, and the Western Cape inter-faith religious leaders
- Gareth Ackerman, chairman of Pick n Pay

### **Nelson Mandela Foundation**

The Nelson Mandela Foundation, with the Wits School of Law as co-convenor, also hosted talks between government officials, Right2Know, the Freedom of Expression Institute, Institute for Security Studies, the Open Society Foundation and Media Monitoring Africa, writes [Business Report](#). The state was represented by the justice department, the National Intelligence Agency, the Inspector General of Intelligence and the Human Rights Commission.

Meanwhile, the NEPAD Business Foundation invites the public next week Wednesday to attend a heated debate on the proposed bill and the way it will affect the country's private sector, if it is indeed enacted in its current form.

The event will take place on Wednesday 15 June at 2pm at its offices (Mott MacDonald House, 359 Rivonia Boulevard in Rivonia, Johannesburg). Speakers include NEPAD Business Foundation's Geoff Rothschild, Dr Dale McKinley of R2K and National Press Club chairperson Yusuf Abramjee.

To RSVP, email Hayley Alfery at [hayley.alfers@thenbf.co.za](mailto:hayley.alfers@thenbf.co.za)

*Si vis pacem, para bellum!*

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### **ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA**

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