

Sanef outraged by abuse of journalists

The South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef) is outraged by four more incidents of the abuse of power by police officers, security personnel and taxi drivers against journalists...



(Image extracted from the [Sanef website](#))

- In the latest incidents on Tuesday, 21 April, a reporting team from the *Daily Sun* covering the burning of two Golden Arrow buses in Nyanga, Cape Town were assaulted and abused by so-called "Amaphela" taxi drivers. Reporter Mandla Mnyakan and photographer Lulekwa Mbadamane were covering riots by taxi drivers after traffic police had impounded 45 taxis in the past two weeks. Mandla and Lulekwa drove past a scene where a Golden Arrow bus was burning in Govan Mbeki Drive in Nyanga. They parked their car and got out when a group of men stormed them and asked why they were taking pictures. The men, who were carrying bricks, proceeded to search the journalists and asked them whether they were carrying cameras. Lulekwa was hiding her camera under her jacket when the men insisted on searching the journalists' car. A group of about 20 men surrounded them. They found Mbadamane's camera and destroyed it by smashing the camera on the road. They also took her cell phone and instructed the journalists to drive off if they didn't want to die, before pelting the vehicle with stones.
- Also on Tuesday, Mathews Baloyi was safely escorted out of Jeppestown in the evening just before the military and police raid of the area after residents saw him raise his camera and started threatening beat him and other journalists for the *Sunday Times* pictures of Emmanuel Sithole being killed in Alex, which led to the arrest of the four suspects.
- On 15 April, *Eyewitness News* reporter Thembekile Mrototo was forced by a police officer in Jeppestown, Johannesburg to hand over his cell phone after using it to take pictures of police action against looters. The officer proceeded to delete the pictures from his phone and then gave the phone back. The officer wasn't wearing a police badge at the time.
- On 8 April, Frans le Roux, a journalist at *Paarl Post* community newspaper, was physically prevented by a security guard from the Passenger Rail Authority of SA (Prasa) from taking pictures of a train derailment in Paarl. Le Roux was trying to take pictures from the road when the guard stormed at him and prevented him from taking photos. This is not the first time the newspaper has experienced this kind of behaviour from Prasa security guards. The editor of *Paarl Post* has since lodged a complaint with Prasa.
- On 9 April, journalist Eliot Mahlase from the *Pretoria Rekord* was detained for hours by the Tshwane Metro police and forced to delete pictures he had taken of one of the officers stopping and detaining a motorist. Mahlase believed that the motorist was being arrested for alleged reckless driving and saw him being manhandled by the metro police officers. Mahlase was shocked when one of the policemen he had photographed tried to thrust him into the back of a police van and protested that he was not a criminal. He had been taking pictures legally in a public street. He was taken to the Garsfontein police station where he was ordered to delete the pictures from the cellphone he had used and then hand the cellphone to the officer. He was released some hours later after a senior member of the *Rekord* editorial staff had intervened. On 14 April, the Tshwane metro police held a meeting with the editor and deputy editor of the *Pretoria Rekord* and a formal complaint as well as a criminal case have been lodged. The TMPD has promised to investigate the matter but have been disputing the details of Mahlase's allegations.

Extremely concerned

Sanef is extremely concerned at the conduct of the police, metro police and security officers involved in these instances of the abuse of media freedom, which is contrary to the regulations in Police Standing Orders, which state that police should not obstruct journalists at a crime scene. Sanef will send a request for an urgent meeting with the national Police

Commissioner, General Riah Phiyega, to whom it has complained in the past about police interfering with journalists carry out their duties and ordering the deletion of pictures from cameras and cellphones.

Sanef is deeply worried that this unlawful conduct of the police is increasing and is becoming almost a ritual followed by officers when journalists arrive at scenes of crime or accident. Sanef demands that the Commissioner should issue instructions to stop this conduct and take public action against those responsible.

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