

FXI's picketing at the SABC



Bylssa Sikiti da Silva

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The Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) and a number of community-based organisations held a peaceful picket earlier this week outside the SABC headquarters in Auckland Park, Johannesburg, to protest against what they call the public broadcaster's lack of public accountability. FXI spokesperson Torong LD Ramela, told Bizcommunity.com that "it is not over until it is over", warning the SABC to prepare for a long confrontation ahead.

Everything started in November 2006 when the FXI and a group of community-based organisations that form part of the Communication Rights' Campaign (African churches, traditional healers, service delivery lobby groups and various residents' associations) marched to the SABC in support of a demand for its 'public control'.

2006 ultimatum

"We gave them an ultimatum until the end of 2006 to respond to all our demands, which included the end to victimisation of progressive journalists and the censorship programme of the SABC, and the implementation of the recommendations of Sisulu Commission of inquiry," Tamela said.

"We also wanted, among others, the airing of Thabo Mbeki documentary, which for some strange reasons, was pulled off the air at the last minute."

But until now, the SABC refuses to budge, simply ignoring their demands and concerns – a situation that has prompted many observers to believe that the FXI might be fighting a losing battle.

But Tamela is adamant the struggle will not end until victory is certain. "It is going to be a long confrontation," he told Bizcommunity.com this week. "We will be dancing there at least two to three times per week. We can do it at any moment. It is guaranteed in the Constitution.

Army camp

"The struggle for the independence of the SABC should not only be legal, but political as well because it is a contested terrain. It is a pity the public broadcaster is being run like an army camp and has become the government's conveyor belt."

SABC's Charlotte Mampane, who spoke to picketers on Tuesday, 6 February 2007, on behalf of Group CEO Dali Mpofu, promised – again – to look at ways of establishing a platform to engage all parties.

According to insiders, there is a huge climate of discomfort, dissatisfaction and unhappiness in the Auckland Park newsrooms, where the staff is not free to express themselves in the spirit of journalistic principles, but follow certain well-established guidelines and norms or be shown the door.

Analysts believe that the successive resignation of talented and free-thinking journalists Nikiwe Bikitsha – who is heading for the shores of CNBC – and John Perlman is a sign that the public broadcaster could be sailing into troubled waters.

Furthermore, the fact that many SABC staffers have been calling Bizcommunity.com non-stop to ask for CNBC's contact details shows that many more want to get out of the Auckland Park parastatal.

Watch this space!

ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA

Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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