

Govt, editors commit to free and thriving media

Government and the media have renewed their commitment to strengthen their relationship while promoting an environment for a free and thriving media.



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Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa on Saturday met with a high level delegation of senior editors from the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF) to discuss various issues affecting government and the media. The meeting at the Presidential Guest House in Pretoria was also attended by senior government officials as well as industry experts and commentators.

Also present in the meeting were Ministers Jeff Radebe, Nomvula Mokonyane, Siyabonga Cwele, and Deputy Ministers Hlengiwe Mkhize, John Jeffery and Obed Bapela.

In a joint communique read at the end of the meeting, the parties agreed that a free and thriving media was crucial to scrutinise the actions and policies of government with the ability and balance to commend success and highlight shortcomings.

The meeting also received a report by the Press Council on the media industry's system of voluntary independent co-regulation to deal with media consumers' or sources' complaints about coverage they consider problematic. The Press Council's mandate was being broadened to deal with online publications as well.

SANEF assured government of the media's commitment to the success of the country and South Africa's status and development as a constitutional democracy.

Main issues affecting the media

In its presentation, SANEF identified critical issues within the South African media sector. These included declining

revenues and profits, resulting in cost-cutting, restructuring, jobs and skills losses.

Other issues of concern to SANEF included planned parliamentary hearings on the desirability of a Media Appeals Tribunal and the pending Protection of State Information Bill. SANEF welcomed President Jacob Zuma's stated assurances that hearings will take into account constitutional provisions on free speech and free media.

Further, SANEF also reported on developments and innovation in the training of journalists and discussions with the judiciary and the police to enhance the way media cover the courts and the fight against crime.

The meeting agreed that constructive interaction between government and media, and a free and viable media sector are critical to building a South Africa where citizens are informed and empowered in helping the country realise the promise of 1994.

Both parties agreed on the importance of maintaining healthy relations between government and the media to ensure that South Africans are fully informed and engaged as active participants in the country's development, while government is also held accountable.

The meeting welcomed improvements in the level of trust between government and journalists and committed jointly to deepen trust and more detailed exchanges of views through future interactions. These will include, among other means, quarterly briefings by members of the National Executive to senior editorial executives.

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