

NBC director-general dismissed

WINDHOEK: MISA has expressed concern on recent developments at the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) resulting in the dismissal of the director-general, Bob Kandetu. The dismissal of Kandetu follows among other issues, the controversy over the appearance of an opposition party flag after the President's national address at the end of 2008.

MISA believes that the furore that followed this incident demonstrates the myriad of challenges facing the NBC in carrying out its mandate. The NBC, MISA notes, finds itself in this scenario because there are no clear guidelines, policies and laws that protect the NBC, from interference be it from political or commercial interests.

Media reports on the opposition flag debacle show a broadcaster at war with itself. MISA has called upon the Namibian government to start a process of transforming the NBC into a public broadcaster. The process of the transformation of the NBC into a public broadcaster should take into account the fact that all citizens own the NBC despite political, religious, social status, sexual or gender differences.

MISA believes that there is an urgent need to transform the NBC into a public broadcaster through an act of parliament that clearly states that the role of the NBC is to serve all citizens of Namibia in their diversity. This act of parliament should also clearly state the mandate of the NBC. This mandate should clearly spell out that the NBC's reporting and programming should aim to advance the socio-economic and political interests of all Namibians in their diversity.

The management and editorial (programming) independence of the NBC should be granted in law and mechanisms for accountability of the public broadcaster clearly spelt out in the same law. MISA's position is that the appointment of the NBC Board should also be provided in law and that these processes should involve members of the public as widely as possible.

The Board of the NBC should represent the wide sectoral interests of all Namibians and should be depoliticised. Equally such a board would have power to appoint senior staff on the basis of professional competence. The appointment and accountability of the Board should rest with a select parliamentary committee which should review its work on an annual basis and receive reports on how the NBC is meeting or failing to meet its public mandate.

MISA has requested that such policy changes be spearheaded by the Ministry of Information and Communication. The mandate of the NBC, argues MISA, should clearly state what is expected by Namibian citizens in a Charter that should form the basis of the functions of the NBC. The NBC should then be judged on the basis of how it is meeting expectations on the Charter.

The controversy that has led to the dismissal of the DG clearly shows that management, transparency and accountability systems at the NBC are in shambles and the loser in all this are citizens who pay for the sustenance of the NBC through license fees and taxes, says MISA. The future of the NBC and its success in striving to be the leading communicator can

only be met if its independence is guaranteed.

The cycle of firing and appointing new senior staff under the same unworkable structures will only create a vicious cycle that serves no one at the end of the day, says a statement from MISA.

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