

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB STATEMENT ON THE SABC 26 JANUARY 201

TIME HAS COME TO APPOINT A COMMISSION OF ENQUIRY

The National Press Club has called on government to appoint a fully-fledged commission of enquiry to investigate the SABC as a matter of urgency.

This follows a scalding South Gauteng High Court judgment on Monday, in which former SABC News head, Snuki Zikalala has been accused of manipulating coverage with a political motive and of effective pre-censorship.

The ruling found that the embattled public broadcaster violated its license conditions through Zikalala's acts and was also guilty of "a dishonest attempt to cover up the situation."

The judgment also accuses Zikalala of "unlawfully manipulating" news items on Zimbabwe's 2005 elections and blacklisting certain commentators to silence critical voices.

The press club says the rot has plagued the SABC for far too long and it believes the latest allegations are only the tip of the iceberg.

Press club chairman Yusuf Abramjee, said the judgment was of "serious concern" and needed to be fully investigated. "We applaud the court for ordering the Independent Communication Authority of South Africa to reopen its investigation into alleged political interference at the SABC, after an appeal by the Freedom of Expression Institute, but we need more. We now need government to appoint a Commission of Enquiry.

"The South African public needs answers and rightfully demands an honest, clean and transparent public broadcaster.

"The situation at the SABC remains a concern as the ructions at Auckland Park continue. The good, bad and ugly – both past and present – needs to be laid on the table once and for all."

Abramjee said if this does not happen, the public broadcaster would continue to be bogged down by ongoing allegations and denials.

He said current and former employees need to come forward and play open cards, adding that it was also necessary for Zikalala to come out publicly and respond to the court's decision.

"We expect him to be honest and open. While there are many hard working, committed and efficient SABC staffers, the corporation must get rid of the rotten apples once and for all, as it is vital for the public broadcaster to cover news accurately, fairly, balanced and objectively. We need media freedom and transparency.

Abramjee said the SABC was an important platform with powerful mediums, but it continues to deteriorate at the expense of the South African public. “They need credible editors and journalists and not people with political baggage. It’s time for a total cleanup.”

The National Press Club has also expressed concern that the SABC continues to be a topic of news, while it should be producing news.

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