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News Release

INDEPENDENT RESEARCH SURVEY STRESSES THE PIVOTAL NEED FOR MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN JOURNALISTS AND GOVERNMENT SPOKESPERSONS

National Press Club commits to further engagement with influential role players

According to an independent research survey conducted in October 2011, commissioned by the National Press Club and conducted amongst mainstream journalists and government spokespersons across the country, the working relationship between journalists and government spokespersons requires critical attention.

The purpose of the online study, the first in its kind, was to determine the realities faced by both parties in this relationship.

The survey, sponsored by Consulta Research, an associate of Business Enterprises (University of Pretoria), concluded that the perspectives as highlighted in the survey are indeed diverse, emphasising vast realities experienced by both parties. It furthermore underlined that those who are engaged in existing relationships with one another over a period of time, are more successful at meeting one another's needs opposed to those who battle to find common ground.

Close to 55 percent of government spokesperson respondents rated the relationship between themselves and journalists as being somewhat more than they expected. Ethical conduct was raised by government spokespersons as an important aspect which influences their relationships with journalists.

In contrast, 45 percent of journalist respondents rated the relationship as somewhat less than expected. The reasons for the lower rating by journalists held similar patterns across the study with reference to follow-up and feedback, spokesperson availability and queries answered within deadline as the primary challenges.

A few open-ended mentions in the survey contextualised that a number of existing government spokespersons hold journalistic backgrounds which may seem to add to their levels of empathy with the pressures faced by journalists as experienced on a day-to-day basis. Journalists, on the other hand, seem to have far less empathy with government spokespersons' responsibilities in comparison as it's held that the role of a government spokesperson is to engage the media.

Furthermore, the extent of qualitative input (additional explanations and recommendations) given by journalists and government spokespersons stressed the importance and seriousness in which the survey was taken.

National Press Club Chairperson Yusuf Abramjee says: "The survey highlighted areas of concern raised by both journalists and government spokespersons. These important issues now require courageous engagement amongst relevant role players

to determine tangible and responsible actions going forward. Effective communication is vital. While there are pockets of excellence in government communication, there are still far too many problems being experienced.”

Specific areas that were explored by the study, as seen from a media perspective, included the availability of government spokespersons, turn-around time by government spokespersons and journalists’ understanding of the difficulties under which government spokespersons have to work.

Seen from a government perspective, areas that were measured included top-of-mind experiences resulting from their interaction with journalists, their understanding of the difficulties under which journalists have to work and the extent to which government spokespersons feel empowered to optimise their roles as government spokespersons.

Open-ended questions – posed to both parties – focused research attention on the relationship being built on good faith of one another’s roles and functions, the extent of mutual trust and mutual respect for each other’s roles, the identification of most important expectations of one another, and overall recommendations and recognitions going forward.

The vast majority of respondents engage one another on a weekly basis. A total number of 69 respondents participated in the survey, which included a 10 percent response rate from government and 13 percent response rate from the media.

The on-line survey was targeted to members and non-members of the National Press Club and government spokespersons as per the existing GCIS database.

The electronic copy of the survey results can be viewed at www.nationalpressclub.co.za/download/npc_survey_2011.pdf

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