

SABC wants public money for DTT, retrenchment packages

 By Issa Sikiti da Silva: @sikitimedia

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The cash-strapped and troubled SABC this week launched a desperate plea to Government for money to fund its voluntary retrenchment packages programme, roll out its digital migration project and establish a 24-hour news channel. Broken, insolvent and on the brink of collapse two years ago, the SABC was bailed out with R1 billion by Government to help it stand on its feet and plan ahead, with a further R4.73 million to be given at later stage, provided that it met certain conditions.



The SABC told the parliamentary committee on communications this week that it has gone far to meeting those conditions, and made significant progress in terms of turning the SABC around. The department of communications (DoC) and the national treasury also attended the Cape Town meeting.

Additional funding

SABC spokesperson Kaizer Kganyago told Bizcommunity.com earlier today, Wednesday, 17 August 2011, that his organisation was not requesting for the rest of that bail-out money now, but for additional funding to finance a number of projects, including digital terrestrial television (DTT) roll-out.

Elaborating on the three-year retrenchment programme that will see 800 employees' names struck off the Auckland Park roll, he said: "Our aim is not to forcefully retrench people, but to let natural attritions take its course, whereby people will resign and look for greener pastures, and others reach the retirement age.

"And we told Parliament that the process can be speeded up if we can have money to offer people packages to go voluntarily."

The SABC, which currently has 3800 employees, is hoping to be left with 3000.

Not on target

However, while the SABC claimed in its presentation that it has made a lot of progress in meeting the government guarantee

targets, the National Treasury saw it otherwise, telling the committee that the public broadcaster was not on target in terms of a number of guarantee agreements.

The national treasury argued that the SABC would not be sustainable if it did not get government funding for a number of projects. Treasury was also said to be worried that the SABC was asking for capital and operating costs, and relying on getting this public funding and did not have a plan B if it did not get it. It also said the SABC seems to have made significant savings through cutting back on content.

The three bodies were then asked to continue their work and consolidate a report to the committee, to be presented in mid-October this year.

Meanwhile, media union MWASA, which is still reeling from a defeat inflicted by the Labour Court in the collective agreement matter involving its 'sworn enemy' SABC, plans to apply for a hearing of the merits of its case at a later stage.

"13 members short"

"There are interim practical measures that we have considered," spokesperson Tuwani Gumani said in a statement issued this week. "Even though we do not trust the membership figures provided by the SABC, we are made to understand that MWASA is said to be a mere 13 members short of the new threshold of 500 members within the bargaining unit."

SOS Support Public Broadcasting spokesperson Kate Skinner told Bizcommunity.com: "The important issue is that MWASA gets back its organising and bargaining rights. The union is raising important issues around the SABC's turnaround strategy and transformation issues more broadly.

"Their voice needs to be heard. The court needs to hear the issues but also it is critical that MWASA proves to the SABC that it has the minimum threshold of 500 members. This issue needs to be resolved urgently."

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