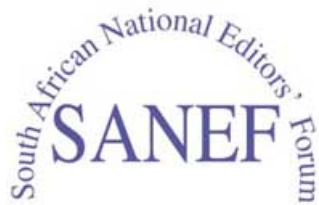


Sanef condemns police interference in press freedom

The South African National Editors' Forum calls upon the police and the public to respect the right of journalists to do their work and to protect them against those who may not wish for the truth to be known. This follows police forcing a journalist to delete her photos and the public stoning of a journalist in ongoing unrest in Soweto.

In the first incident, three Soweto police officers allegedly forced SAPA journalist Mpho Raborife to delete pictures from her cellphone on Thursday. In the second incident, a reporter for Eyewitness News, Leeto Khoza, was hit on the head by a rock and is presently in hospital.



Forced to delete photos

Raborife drove past three Somali-owned shops in Dobsonville on her way to work when she noticed three police vehicles outside the shops. Cognisant of the unrest that have occurred in parts of the township this week, Raborife stopped to investigate what was happening at the scene. She saw two men loading groceries into a van and took pictures with her cellphone. She then left.

The police started following Raborife and told her to pull over. They told her she was not allowed to take pictures without their permission.

Raborife showed the officers her press card and told them she was fully within her rights to take photos in a public space. One police officer said she was not allowed to take pictures and "leak them to the media."

After threatening to take her to the police station commander, the officers watched as Raborife deleted the pictures from her cellphone. The officers took down her details and took a photo of her vehicle before letting her go.

The role of the media

Sanef is perturbed by these actions, which are in contravention of police standing orders that prohibit police officers from deleting journalists' pictures at crime scenes. This particularly as it comes up yet again, despite promises by senior police officers, including the national commissioner, that such illegal behaviour would be stopped.

Khoza was covering the unrest in Meadowlands Zone 5, Soweto when an angry crowd attacked him late on Thursday afternoon. As protesters were throwing rocks at police and shop owners, they turned their attention on journalists, claiming they would reveal their identities. Khoza was hit on the head with a rock and lost consciousness for some time. He is still in hospital receiving intensive care.

Sanef calls on the public and on community leaders to inculcate understanding of the role of the media within their communities.