

# Icasa to rule on SABC's violence ban

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The SABC will find out on Thursday whether or not its controversial decision to ban footage of violent protests is valid when the Independent Communications Authority of SA (Icasa) delivers its verdict.



123RF

In May, Media Monitoring Africa, the SOS Support Public Broadcasting Coalition and the Freedom of Expression Institute lodged a complaint with Icasa's complaints and compliance committee, challenging the validity of the SABC's decision.

Should Icasa reverse the move, this would deepen the crisis at the public broadcaster, which has been riddled with successive governance failures.

In the aftermath of the ban, a number of senior journalists at the broadcaster are facing disciplinary action for questioning the decision. Bizarrely, the SABC board has denied that the ban was a policy position, calling it an "editorial decision".

"Therefore it is incorrect to insinuate that this was a policy issue," board chairman Mbulaheni Maguvhe said, seemingly in response to a public dressing down by ANC communications subcommittee head Jackson Mthembu on Tuesday.

The party has summoned Communications Minister Faith Muthambi to Luthuli House to account for the mess at the SABC, as it says the shenanigans at the broadcaster do not adhere to ANC policy.

Media Monitoring Africa director William Bird said the SABC board's defence - that the decision to ban footage of violent protests was not a new editorial policy - was immaterial.

"It's pure obfuscation. When you are having to scratch around to make those kinds of distinctions, it is fundamentally ridiculous," said Bird.

The South African Communist Party (SACP) joined the fray on Wednesday, picketing outside the SABC's headquarters in Johannesburg and calling for the broadcaster's board to be dissolved for failing to hold management accountable.

SACP second deputy general secretary Solly Mapaila claimed on Wednesday that the SABC was on the verge of becoming a "state" broadcaster. The SACP has had running battles with the SABC for the past five years. In 2011, SACP general secretary Blade Nzimande's wife, Phumelele Ntombela-Nzimande, was axed from the board.

In early 2016, Joyce MoloiMoropa, the SACP's national treasurer, resigned as chairwoman of Parliament's portfolio committee on communications, a crucial mechanism for oversight of the executive.

Moloi-Moropa had infamous run-ins with Muthambi and with disgraced former SABC chairwoman Ellen Tshabalala.

Mapaila said the SABC board had been complicit in the "rot" at the broadcaster.

"(We) express our concern about the rot which is taking place at the SABC in terms of a personality cult, in terms of dictatorial methods of the governance of journalism, including the complicity of the board that is unable to stop the rot here."

The SACP also called for Hlaudi Motsoeneng's head, saying that he was not qualified to lead the SABC at the level of chief operating officer.

*Source: Business Day*

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