

News of the World's end of the road: lessons for SA media?



Bylssa Sikit da Silva: @sikitimedia

11 Jul 2011

Can South Africa's newsrooms, its regulation watchdog the [Press Council of South Africa](#) and its brand new [Press Freedom Commission](#) (PFC) learn some valuable lessons from British Sunday tabloid [News of the World](#)'s 'shameful' end of the road amid allegations of phone hacking?



"Yes, I think we need to look at how the UK government has criticised the UK [Complaints Commission](#), questioning its legitimacy. What this says is that we are not unique in having a system that needs to be strengthened," Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) head William Bird told Bizcommunity.com early today, Monday, 11 July 2011.

"Called for an independent inquiry"



Bird added: "The question is how and what mechanism will have the most credibility for ordinary members of the public? I think it is also worth looking at the fact that the UK government has called for an independent inquiry to the issue, compared to a parliamentary hearing - one from a conservative, pro-capitalist dominated government in the UK, and the other from an outwardly more left-leaning social democratic government."

News of the World, which published its last edition dubbed [Thank You & Goodbye](#) yesterday, Sunday, 10 July 2011, is owned by News Corp boss [Rupert Murdoch](#).

Unlike Britain, the [practice of phone hacking](#) as an illegal way of collecting information is not a common practice in SA.

Careful not to equate too much

Bird said SA needed to be careful not to equate its situations too much, as its media has not been accused of the things that precipitated the crisis in the UK. "If you look at issues of how the media treats the government in the UK, they are often a lot more critical than ours."

Rhodes University media professor Jane Duncan said: "Although we do have tabloids, there is no indication of wide-scale use of illegal methods of collecting information."

"But one of the reasons that this tabloid culture has been allowed to fester unchecked in Britain is that the Press Complaints Commission in the UK has become a poodle of the publishers and owners, because it is dominated by them."

"Voice of working journalists is weak"

"The PCC members, Murdoch and the government, both Labour and Conservative, are all part of the same political class - hence the tendency to scratch one another's backs (or cover one another's backs), so the voice of working journalists is weak."

"Unions like the National Union of Journalists, which could have checked the decline of ethical standards from within, have been weakened by Rupert Murdoch's union bashing tactics."

Duncan, who has [decried the absence of the voice of the working journalist](#) in the newly launched PFC, said one of the

useful lessons that can be extrapolated from the *NoW* ([#NOTW](#)) affair is that journalists need to organise to defend the basis of their craft.



PRESS FREEDOM
COMMISSION

"Hold the balance of power"

"These organisations need to adopt and enforce ethical codes for their members. They need to ensure that they hold the balance of power in the Press Council.

"Furthermore, the moral of the story for other countries is 'do not let Rupert Murdoch's empire into your country'; it is a cancer that eats away at ethical journalism."



For more:

For more:

- Bizcommunity: [Media-regulation glee club has a new hit show](#)
- Bizcommunity: [What's so special about the Press Freedom Commission?](#)
- Google News Search: ["news of the world" press complaints commission](#)
- Twitter Search: [#NOTW OR "News of the World"](#)

Last updated at 2.19pm on 11 July 2011.

For More list updated at 2.42pm on 11 July 2011.

ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA: @SIKITIMEDIA

Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

- Angola tense as journalists, protesting youth targeted by government - 1 Nov 2011
- Managing promotional resources: are TV broadcasters getting it right? - 1 Nov 2011
- Mbalula vs the media: privacy, dignity vs public interest - 31 Oct 2011
- Multimillion-rand Motorola Razr marketing campaign - 28 Oct 2011
- [Tech4Africa] Power failures, low bandwidth? Try cloud computing - 28 Oct 2011

View my profile and articles...

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>