



SEKUNJALO INVESTMENT HOLDINGS (PTY) LTD

The Sekunjalo Group

26 February 2021

sent via email to: director@sanef.org.za

The Chairman
South African National Editors' Forum

Dear Mr Ngalwa

Your correspondence to the Public Investment Corporation (PIC) and copied to me refers.

It is clear from SANEF's correspondence to the PIC, that your organisation is driven by a hidden agenda and one which is not related to media freedom, freedom of expression or the protection of jobs in the media industry.

For the purposes of this communication, I will confine myself to addressing the blatant misrepresentation of the facts related to the commercial aspects of our business. The unfounded allegations of editorial interference are addressed by Independent Media's editors in their own statement which is attached for easy reference.

The arrogance displayed by SANEF in its correspondence to the PIC cannot go unchallenged.

SANEF is an NGO/voluntary organisation, which has regrettably strayed into areas which it should not be involved in. The most basic principle of journalism is to gather all sides of the story and request information from the people that you are writing about. Once again, SANEF has failed to contact Independent Media or me to get clarity about matters pertaining to Independent Media and its business.

SANEF, in its letter to the PIC, deliberately obfuscated the transformation that has taken place at Independent Media and within the media sector as whole, as well as the role of our editors, and our press ombudsman office, in the effective functioning and integrity of our editorial processes.

Recently, the Editor-in-Chief of Independent Media, Mr Aneez Salie, convened a meeting with yourself to address their impasse with SANEF and to clarify any differences that may exist between our editors and SANEF. Whilst I was not party to that meeting, I understand from the editor-in-chief that he had requested and proposed a further meeting between SANEF and myself and that you would take the opportunity to engage with my office to arrange such. Somewhat regrettably, this is still to materialise with no apparent attempt by SANEF to arrange such.

If SANEF was genuinely interested in the sustainability and transformation of the media industry, as it claims, then surely it would in the first instance, acknowledge that Independent Media has an Editor-in-Chief who plays an overarching role of our business, as well as our Press Ombudsman, press council and press appeals panel. No mention of this was made whatsoever.

It is absurd that SANEF feels it has the right to interfere with the ownership structure of Independent Media, going so far as to engage directly with a state institution to insist that Independent Media should join an external voluntary body.

Reg No: 1998/008480/07

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Independent Media has at numerous times, categorically stated that in line with international best practices, it has established its own Press Ombudsman processes and invited former editors, respected journalists and high-ranking members of civil society to be a part of it, as well as on the appeals panel.

If you had bothered to contact the Editor-in-Chief, Aneez Salie or the Press Ombudsman, Yogis Nair, or indeed anyone from my office, we would have been able to provide you with all of this necessary information.

SANEF has a long history of irregular conduct – some of which is noted below – but its recent behaviour strays far from the tenets of ethical journalism and media freedom that it purports to uphold and monitor. Recently, all the editors of Independent Media wrote to SANEF (in unison), drawing your attention to their concerns about this conduct and the statements emanating from your organisation.

Despite publicly issuing its statement, which contained a slew of incorrect facts, assumptions and unfounded accusations, SANEF did not post the Independent Media response on its website, for its members or the public to see and be informed. This underscores SANEF's bias in matters related to Independent Media.

SANEF's forked tongue approach in attempting to lobby the PIC to safeguard 1500 jobs at Independent Media, whilst at the same time SANEF actively engages in open sabotage, is a declaration of its true intent to do harm.

Further, I have also previously written to you and Judge Kathy Satchwell (retired) regarding the SANEF report into Media Ethics and Credibility.

In this report, blatant lies are peddled wherein you make the bold claim that "Everyone to whom the Panel spoke, within and outside the community of journalism, deplored the 'cronyism' of the Independent Group. Regrettably, despite requests for meetings, the Panel received no response from the group chairman, Dr Iqbal Survé."

In our correspondence with you and Judge Satchwell on this matter, we urged you to correct this material error. True to form, SANEF has not done so. To date, I still await a response from both Judge Satchwell and SANEF.

SANEF's attempt to exploit the recent allegations at the State Capture probe related to the African News Agency (ANA), is yet another example of SANEF's shameless attempts to tarnish our business. Notwithstanding the fact that the CEO of ANA is on record as confirming that an internal investigation is underway to establish the facts behind ANA's commercial contract with the SSA, SANEF has chosen to distort this matter and to peddle its own destructive narrative.

As you are aware, the evidence at the State Capture probe is incomplete. It remains to be seen whether SANEF will act with the same vigour it has displayed with regard to ANA.

For the record, SANEF's agenda was made blatantly clear before Independent Media was even acquired by the Sekunjalo Consortium from the Irish media group. It was SANEF, through Nic Dawes who was Chairperson at the time, that had opposed the sale to the Sekunjalo Consortium and had threatened to use the Competition Commission to block the sale.

Dawes' then employer, the Mail and Guardian and its shareholders and founders, tried to force the transfer of three of Independent Media titles - the Cape Times, Pretoria News and The Mercury – over to them, failing which, SANEF would object to the sale of Independent Media to the Sekunjalo group.

It is now a public fact that Mr Dawes was forced to apologise for his conduct and SANEF's conduct and that of other members of SANEF at the time.

This attempt by SANEF to stop transformation of the media industry even before Sekunjalo had bought Independent Media, exposes and reveals its hidden agenda.

SANEF is a self-appointed guardian of media freedom and freedom of expression and has created the misguided perception that it speaks on behalf of all media organisations and media workers in South Africa. It does not.

Despite your attempts to present otherwise, Independent Media is proud that it is able to represent the broader voice of South Africa and narrates more than just one side of our country's diverse story and history. We are not afraid to act without fear or favour.

I trust that my correspondence to you, gives you an opportunity to reflect on the disgraceful conduct perpetrated by SANEF, in its attempts to subvert the only truly transformed media company in South Africa and to undermine the editorial team of Independent Media.

SANEF's letter to the PIC is a misguided and arrogant attempt to malign me and our editorial leadership. The attached statement by Independent Media's editorial leadership is self-explanatory. We will not stand back and allow SANEF to continue with its campaign of bullying and harassment.

Notwithstanding the shocking and irresponsible conduct of SANEF and its leadership, we will not be distracted from our collective responsibility of making fundamental media transformation a reality.

If SANEF does indeed believe in the basic principle of journalism of 'telling the truth' it should indeed come clean and inform the nation of the real reasons for its ongoing attempts at intimidation, interference, bullying and reckless conduct.

We reserve our rights.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Iqbal Survé', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dr Iqbal Survé
Executive chairman of Independent Media