

Introductory remarks by SUZANNE VOS, Director, SABC, to PC: Communications, Parliament, Tuesday March 6, 2012.

The Chairperson has requested me to briefly address Hon. Members of the Committee prior to the Acting COO and the SABC Task Team presenting their report on the Corporation's response to the Auditor-General's findings and recommendations.

I have been asked to do so because I am the only member of the Board who was around at the time the matter evolved and thereafter -- starting with the shock report compiled by Unions and their members affiliated to the SABC and sent to this Portfolio Committee containing various allegations of corruption and mismanagement within the Corporation (much of which has turned out to be true).

When I left Parliament in 2009 I was given the privilege of being appointed to the five-person Interim Board of the SABC in mid-2009 for its six months term of office during which time the Auditor-General conducted his investigation -- which was initiated by this Portfolio Committee.

My remarks on behalf of my colleagues are therefore intended to give background and context to the report which will be presented by the Acting COO, Mr. Hlaudi Motsoeneng, and his team.

As an aside, it is my view, having witnessed first-hand the state of the Corporation during the tenure of the Interim Board, that last Sunday's newspaper reports of an ANC draft discussion document relating to the SABC accurately reflect the situation I found myself in 2009.

The document, if reported correctly, is said to contend that insufficient attention had been placed (I am assuming past tense) on holding those responsible to account for the financial and organization maladministration that had plunged the SABC into crisis.

*This is precisely why we are here today.*

It was further reported that "institutional structures responsible for oversight" (past tense?) had not been effective.

*Again this is precisely why we are here today.*

It is again correct that the discussion document contends that the series of past crises at the SABC reflected a "lack of leadership, lack of accountability and poor management".

Board members will however disagree if the draft document avers that this situation presently prevails at the SABC (and within bodies charged with oversight of the public broadcaster). It does not.

In recent years this Portfolio Committee (in the Parliament elected in 2009) has in my experience and that of Board colleagues been acutely cognizant and diligent with regard to its oversight responsibilities given the financial collapse of the Corporation in 2009 and has been vigilant in its responsibilities and demanded accountability in this regard and all other relevant matters.

The Department of Communications and the Treasury have also been extremely pro-active.

The work of the so-called "Turnaround" and task teams within the Board, the DOC, the Treasury and management has been arduous and not without setbacks to which I will attempt to allude to.

The Interim Board and the current Board of the Corporation inherited for the most part the same highly paid and well travelled executive and management teams who were responsible for the crises at the SABC in the first place. Some senior employees, if not entirely responsible, were most certainly not blameless and were complicit in their inability to foresee the consequences of their collective decision-making and lack of focus. Others, we have since learned, sounded alarm bells which were ignored, were subjected to bullying and left the Corporation as soon as they could do so.

I will not dwell on labour-related difficulties inherent when attempting rapid and effective change management – they are an obvious consequence when corporate structures and leaderships must be quickly reorganized.

It is a fact that the Board and the new executive leadership of the SABC (as well as now our third Minister of Communications since 2009) have, to this day, remained to a certain extent captive to certain individuals and some mindsets within the Corporation who do not appear to have the requisite capacity to effect the work required of them. Nor, sadly, do they seem to be seized with the urgency of the situation in which we find ourselves.

We are also faced with the challenge of certain persons trying to use the media to preserve a status quo of work ethic and hierarchy within the organization that we as a Board are determined to dismantle where necessary. They are using character assassination and duplicitous re-engineering of facts into fiction and often outright lies to paint a mischievous picture of instability and mismanagement. Exposure and censure looms, of that we can assure you all.

Much is changing within the Corporation and has changed quite dramatically for the better in past months.

Our newly-appointed GCEO knows only too well where the problem areas lie and what needs to be done.

Immediately after his appointment late last year the Acting COO called what is called a "Rediffusion" of the SABC and announced to all employees throughout the country simultaneously how the Auditor-General's report was to be addressed: Who would comprise the team; what their individual mandates were and by when they were to report.

Mr. Motsoeneng was solely responsible for devising the investigation and the compilation of its findings.

All deadlines have been met and the Board continues to have the utmost confidence in the work so far completed and the team members competence and commitment to their task.

This "exercise" (for want of a better word) has revealed to the Board the names and indeed the faces of persons mostly within the middle-management structures of the SABC with expertise and management skills who, when literally plucked out of relative obscurity (as far as the Board's interaction with employees is concerned) have performed brilliantly.

The Acting COO was quick in identifying the "best of the best" within the Corporation and his team has shown the results which can be achieved when skills and commitment are identified, promoted and encouraged.

It is clear that there is still some work to be done in addressing the legacies of many past factors relating to corruption, cronyism, nepotism, ineptitude, indolence, arrogance, entitlement and downright incompetence within the SABC.

It is also clear that there are many persons committed to excellence in public broadcasting and who promote good corporate governance in all that they do.

We have experienced as a Board that in spite of the Auditor-General's investigation and report and in spite of the ongoing SIU investigation and in spite of charges being having been laid and other matters relating to corruption that are currently under investigation by the NPA, there are still employees who think they are too clever by far and who still attempt to defraud the Corporation.

The Board is therefore confident that it can at last be reliant on a new era of leadership within the SABC to effect excellence in corporate governance and who will constructively engage with all charged with the effective oversight required of the public broadcaster. With your permission Hon. Chairperson, Mr. Motsoeneng and his team will now present their report.