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19

The Campaign for Open Media (COM) has called on Codesa to open its proceedings to both the press and the public.

In a statement sent to Codesa this morning, COM said it believed that as a matter of principle Codesa should allow members of the press and broadcast media as well as members of the public to observe and report on its proceedings "both when it meets in plenary as well as in working groups".

COM said the present method of holding press conferences and of journalists randomly obtaining information on their own initiative did not provide an adequate system for the full and free flow of information on the proceedings of Codesa.

"The information emanating from this flawed system is at best piecemeal and does not provide the opportunity for systematic and comprehensive coverage and scrutiny of the issues that Codesa deals with. Many of these issues have far-reaching implications for the people of South Africa and they have a right to be fully informed."

COM said that Codesa should be open to public and press scrutiny in the same way that the proceedings of Parliament are. "In fact, since Codesa has in some ways overtaken the role of Parliament, it is crucial that its proceedings take place under public glare.

"We realise that sensitive discussions take place in Codesa and that there is a danger of media exposure encouraging political posturing and inflexible positional bargaining on the part of delegates. However, the principles of open and democratic government, in whatever forums government is exercised, and of a free press, have to override these considerations," COM said.

"We acknowledge, as is the case in Parliament, that when the need arises discussions can proceed in committee away from public scrutiny. Codesa can make use of the same mechanisms. However, the recommendations of committees must thereafter be reported in full to either the relevant working group or a plenary session of Codesa."

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