

Campaign for Open Media ²³

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Moirira Levy

Idasa

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Dear Moira

The Campaign for Open Media would like to submit the attached proposal to Idasa for a joint workshop to be held in the near future.

The proposal concerns the monitoring of the media during the transitional period.

We would appreciate it if you could submit the proposal to the relevant persons or committees in Idasa.

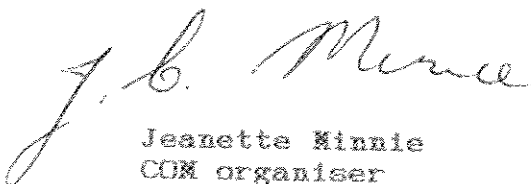
As indicated in the proposal we are hoping that such a joint workshop could be held very soon (early June) so that the monitoring project mandated at the "Free, Fair and Open" conference can be implemented. Various media academics who are interested in participating in the project have also indicated that they urgently need to convene such a workshop to discuss the matter.

COM does not have the funding to facilitate such a workshop at present and therefore we are proposing that it be held jointly with Idasa in the hope that you could assist in the quest for money.

We further regard Idasa's participation in such a workshop as a contribution to the debate and discussion about democracy in South Africa. The aim of the monitoring project is to assess whether the media is playing its role as a democratic tool during the transitional period in providing the public with full and accurate information on issues which will affect their futures.

In addition, we have enjoyed holding a joint conference with Idasa in the past.

Yours sincerely



Jeanette Minnie
COM organiser

PROPOSAL FOR CONSIDERATION BY IDASA FOR A JOINT COM/IDASA
WORKSHOP ON MONITORING OF THE MEDIA DURING THE TRANSITION

The Campaign for Open media (COM) is currently concerned with the role of the media as a democratic tool during South Africa's transition from apartheid to a new non-racial dispensation.

COM was mandated at the recent "Free, Fair and Open : Media in the Transition to Democracy" conference to implement a media monitoring programme during the transitional period. It should be noted that monitoring of the media was also mandated by the "Jabulani!: Freedom of the Airwaves" conference in Holland last year as well as by a follow-up conference held at Unibo a few months later.

Broadcast Media:

The "Free, Fair and Open" conference has proposed that regulation of the broadcast media should be depoliticised by transferring control of this media to an Interim Independent Communications Authority (IICA). This and other proposals emanating from the conference are currently under discussion by Codesa's Working Group I. Although the National Party's position on an IICA is not altogether clear, it is resisting all suggestions that the present structures of control at the SABC be changed. Should control of broadcast media not revert to an IICA, monitoring will assume an even more important function in assessing the impact of this media on the political process. Since the SABC is the most controversial case in point, it should be noted that a recent monitoring exercise conducted under COM's auspices of the referendum campaign has demonstrated real bias on the side of SABC's TV1. It should be noted, however, that COM intends to monitor all the broadcast media, including other TV services such as Transkei Broadcasting, Bop TV, as well as other public and private radio stations.

Print Media:

The print media, which is predominantly privately-owned is increasingly arguing that it has a freedom of speech right to be partisan. Monitoring of the media in this context will be aimed at determining the fairness and accuracy of news and the degree to which the public is fully and properly informed about the shaping of a new society. In addition, monitoring of the print media also provides a useful yardstick by which to compare broadcast media. Furthermore, especially mainstream print media is constantly criticised for not providing a fair and balanced portrayal of South Africa, particularly when it comes to points of view held by black communities or interest groups. Neither is the SA Media Council capable of testing these claims. It is concerned with individual events only -- not with trends over a period of time.

COM therefore believes that there should be monitoring during the transitional process and that it needs to be conducted by persons independent of political organisations as well as the media.

JOINT IDASA/COM WORKSHOP ON MONITORING:

To facilitate the process of monitoring it would be beneficial if in the near future (early in June) a workshop could be held drawing together a group of people to discuss ways of ensuring that monitoring is adequately done and in such a way that it does not intervene in the editorial process. Such a group would include COM, IDASA as well as representatives of the print and broadcast media, media academics and people who have been involved in monitoring exercises such as David Smuts from Namibia.

Such a workshop should be divided into different sessions to discuss principled issues and practical issues. The first session would include people such as editors from print and broadcast media, COM, IDASA, etc. The context and aims of monitoring should be defined by this group. This would also provide an opportunity to debate further the reservations representatives of the Argus company have expressed about monitoring.

The second session would include the persons who will practically be involved with the monitoring, such as media academics. They could discuss issues that need to be addressed such as the methodologies to be used, co-ordination of monitoring among regions, etc.

In summary, the first session will deal with the philosophical underpinning of monitoring and the second will be more technical dealing with the practical aspects of monitoring.

Such a workshop could possibly be held in one day over two sessions. However, it may be better to hold it over two days to ensure that there is enough time to cover all issues thoroughly.

Such a workshop could be attended by about 40 participants. If held in Johannesburg travel and accommodation arrangements would have to be made for about 15 participants. However, if necessary, these figures could be lowered to 30 and 10 respectively.