

SANEF MEDIA STATEMENT FOLLOWING SANEF COUNCIL MEETING IN GRAHAMSTOWN

The South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF) at its Council Meeting in Grahamstown, Port Elizabeth at the weekend resolved to make an urgent written submission to President Thabo Mbeki over his immediate signing of the Films and Publications Amendment Bill into law.

Sanef believes that Bill will not pass the constitutional test and resolved to ask President Mbeki to refer it to the Constitutional Court.

The Council also said it would continue with its efforts to lobby for the appointment of an independent SABC board. Sanef also calls for a public and transparent selection process for the appointment of an interim SABC Board equivalent to the way the standard board is appointed.

Sanef noted that it was essential for the SABC to serve its role as a Public Broadcaster without political interference in its programming or news particularly in the run up to the elections.

Sanef welcomes the decision by the Makana municipality to back down on its advertising boycott of Grocott's Mail, and recommends that governmental authorities in general take note of this experience.

The Grahamstown local government acted in the face of a court application for its boycott to be set aside. It was up against legal arguments that its action had violated four provisions of the Constitution as well as three specific laws.

Sanef regards the use of public advertising as a tool of political punishment as being incompatible with the role of free media in a democracy.

SANEF directs government – at all levels - to the media's self-regulatory channels for dealing with complaints. These constitute an appropriate alternative to indefensible actions such as boycotts.