

SANEF welcomes President Zuma's commitment to press freedom. May 10 2009

President Jacob Zuma's commitment in his inauguration speech to defending media freedom in South Africa was noted and welcomed by the SA National Editors' Forum at its council meeting in Johannesburg on Sunday.

"We are encouraged by the new president's remarks on the media and we look forward to further interactions with Mr Zuma and his administration on these issues," Sanef Deputy Chairperson Henry Jeffreys said.

Sanef also observed that, in spite of earlier fears of threats of violence or possible intimidation of journalists covering the recent general elections, these had not materialised. The Independent Electoral Commission's transparency and openness to the media, especially when IEC officials were under huge pressure on election day and the results-counting process, was noted with appreciation.

Editors further expressed serious concerns about restrictions on journalists' access to major sporting and other events of public interest. It viewed onerous accreditation contracts journalists were required to sign as potentially a threat to media freedom and the public's right of access to independent information. Sanef felt all sectors of the media – including owner companies, needed to speak with one voice on this. It would seek to set up a meeting soon of all of these.

The Editors further expressed solidarity with Botswana newspapers' move to take legal action against their government's establishment of a media tribunal, on the grounds that this legislation was unconstitutional.

Council also noted that the MISA chapter in Zimbabwe has expressed concern about the government's intentions to hold a conference on its repressive media legislation, because it believes that the intentions are not genuine, and that media freedom would not be re-established. Sanef editors expressed their support of Misa-Zimbabwe's reservations and its striving for media freedom and calls on the Zimbabwean authorities to respond positively to these concerns.