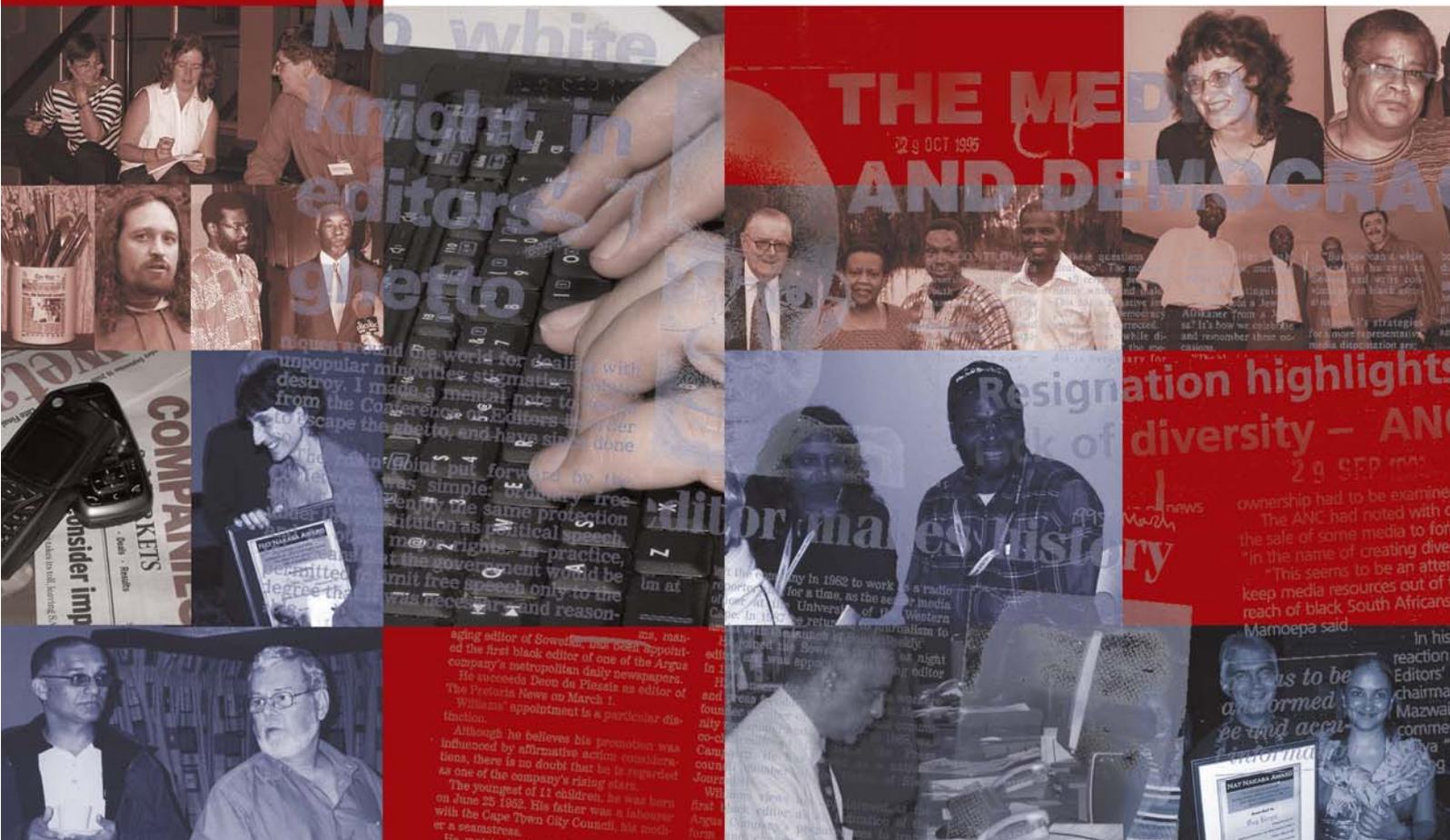




# Part of the story

10 years of the South African National Editors' Forum

Elizabeth Barratt



**Part of the story**

WRITTEN BY **Elizabeth Barratt**

EDITED BY **Guy Berger**

DESIGN BY **Shahn Irwin**

*I would like to dedicate this book to my father, John, and my daughter, Claire, the generations on either side who have supported me so strongly.*

*Sanef has taken me out of the office and into the wider context of journalism, giving me a chance to get to know great colleagues from South Africa and the rest of Africa. It has pushed and pulled me. One of the challenges has been this study, which I hope does justice to all those who have given their time and commitment to Sanef over the years. My thanks go to Moegsien Williams for getting me involved, and to Mathatha Tsedu for keeping me there.*

**Liz Barratt**

Thank you to all those who have recorded Sanef events in pictures over the years and *The Star* for the use of its photographs. Other images come from a variety of newspapers and the *Rhodes Journalism Review*. Special acknowledgement goes to Jurgen Schadeberg for the photo of Nat Nakasa.

Thanks also to Joe Thloloe and Johan de Villiers for their help; and Judy Sandison, Mathatha Tsedu, Lakela Kaunda and Mandla Letlape for anecdotes.

Sanef would like to thank Total for the advert on the back cover.

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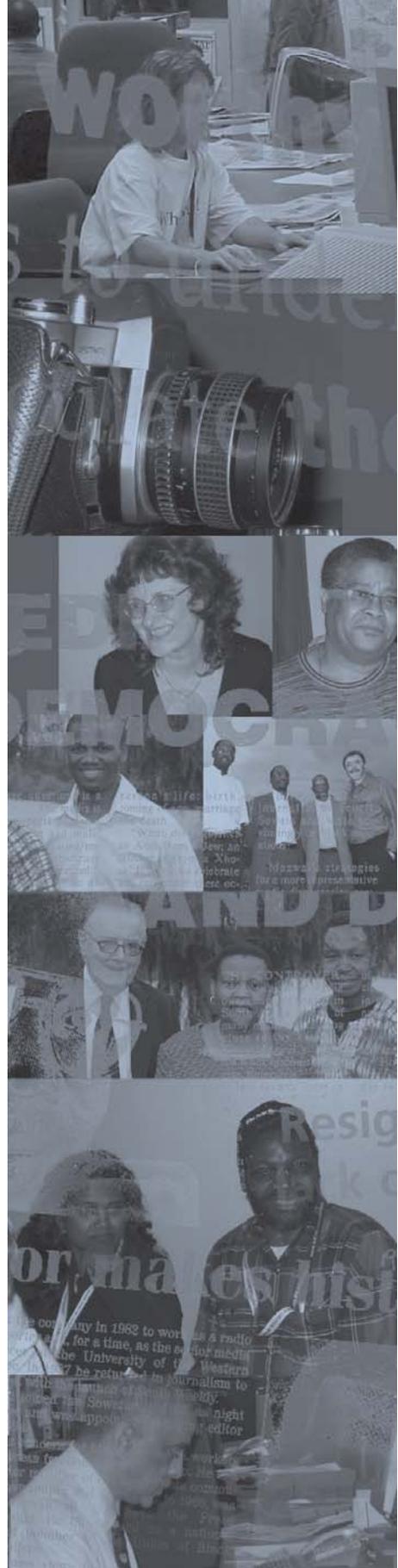


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[www.sanef.org.za](http://www.sanef.org.za)

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The media are your eyes and ears on the world. Media freedom guarantees your right to know what's going on in your country, and participate fully in the decisions affecting you. Media freedom is **your** freedom. Insist on it. To find out more, go to [www.sanef.org.za](http://www.sanef.org.za)



## Narrators, commentators...and actors

When you are in the centre of a story in the making, it is easy to get bogged down in the details of trying to survive from day to day and to miss the big picture.

Many of the people who founded the South African National Editors' Forum ten years ago, operated in it and helped it flourish, were in the centre of a story that is important for our country.

The media in South Africa are part of this society and are therefore obliged to strive for the goals spelled out in the national Constitution.

We have three other responsibilities:

- To hold up the vision in the Constitution and remind South Africans of their commitments;
- To hold all those in power accountable for turning the dream into reality; and
- To tell the daily story of the bumpy journey to this new world.

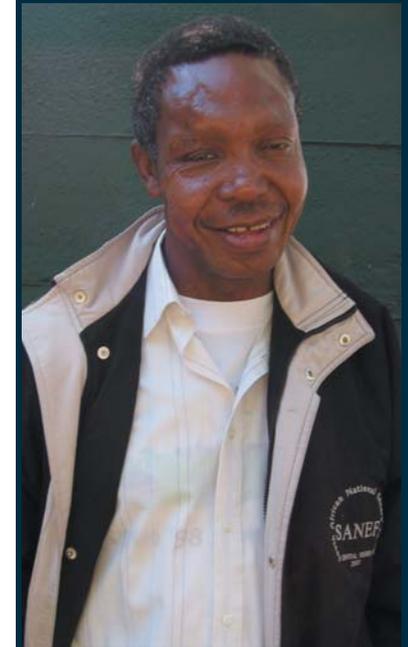
We are part of the story but also stand back to get a better perspective to help us tell it. None has captured this better than Elizabeth Barratt, long-serving Sanef member and an executive editor at *The Star*, in the title of her thesis last year: "Choosing to be part of the story: the participation of the South African National Editors' Forum in the democratising process."

Stellenbosch University awarded her an MA (cum laude) for her work.

That thesis was the foundation of this celebratory book that forces us to see that big picture.

She has captured Sanef, all our contours, pimples and scars. Sanef is not a trade union, not an industry policeman, not a tool to be used by public relations firms to get to a captive collection of editors. Sanef is rather a forum that uses moral persuasion to improve the quality of journalism in South Africa, to transform the industry and to hold up media freedom as a vital pillar of democracy.

Sanef is also grateful to Prof Guy Berger, one of its founding members and head of the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University, for editing the book.



# From struggle journalism

## A DECADE OF WORK

Neither union nor NGO, Sanef is a forum. It brings together editors, senior journalists and journalism educators across the divides of race, institution and media platform to participate in the new South African democracy.

Over 10 years, its members have worked to deepen media freedom and overcome old injustices still present within the industry. The organisation has led debate and projects about the quality of journalism and journalism training.

## LEARNING A NEW ROLE

Sanef's unity and its commitments are highly significant when seen within the potentially divisive historical context: that of a post-apartheid, infant democracy in a developing country.

The negotiated political settlement, signed by African National Congress president Nelson Mandela and National Party leader FW de Klerk in 1993, was embodied in an interim constitution.

From 1993, South Africa had its first-ever bill of

rights – including the right to media freedom.

Since then, South African society, including government, has been learning to deal with the new media freedom. This came after years of coping with an array of restrictions. Journalists have had to learn to work within a different and changing socio-political environment. Another new challenge has been how to relate to a legitimate government.

There has been an imperative to transform journalism staffing and content to reflect and promote equality and nonracialism. Technical changes and an industry stress on the “bottom line” are also part of the picture. Sanef has had to negotiate all these issues.

## COMMON IDEALISM

Sanef has been able to command the ears of presidents and top judges, and engage in scores of activities. This is despite, from the start, being a fragile body with few resources, held together mainly by threads of a common idealism among senior journalists. As the home of those who decide what the news is, Sanef and its positions have evoked widespread respect.

### SECTION 16 of the Constitution

Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes –

- freedom of the press and other media;
- freedom to receive or impart information or ideas;
- freedom of artistic creativity; and
- academic freedom and freedom of scientific research.

The right in subsection (1) does not extend to

- propaganda for war;
- incitement of imminent violence; or
- advocacy of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm.



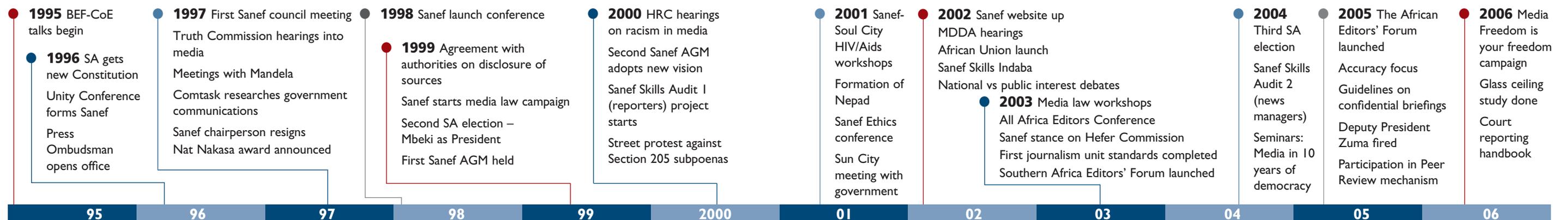
Television cameraman in 1993, and the newspaper lead headline reads ‘Mandela, FW hold summit’

From an initial membership of around 40 to its 190 members in 2006, the forum has continued to attract senior journalists from all media. And from the early days of shoestring budgets, its operating costs are now funded by all the mainstream media.

Sanef's survival and success has required the vision

and commitment of numerous people who themselves have full-time and demanding jobs in stressful environments.

The story that follows shows how the forum has helped to shape media and journalism in a time of rapid change in South Africa and in the wider media world.



# Before Sanef

## DECADES OF DIVISION

White and black editors formed Sanef in 1996 – two years after South Africa’s first democratic election and six years after the liberation movements were unbanned and political parties became nonracial. Why the time lag? The answer lies in the deep racial divisions and inequities within the media.

In apartheid South Africa, only the white minority had rights to democracy, economic opportunities – and the top jobs in media. Media people were polarised between collaboration and complicity, and resistance and repression. All journalism was political.

The 1995 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, examined the role of media under apartheid. It concluded that most of the media – with some important exceptions –

had either deliberately promoted apartheid, or implicitly complied with it. In both ways, media institutions had contributed to a climate of gross human rights violations.

In the decade that led up to the formation of Sanef, those black journalists committed to fighting apartheid saw themselves as

blacks first and journalists second. Meanwhile, even those white journalists who opposed State control of the press often underplayed their relatively privileged position.

## RAPID CHANGES

After the liberation movements were unbanned and Nelson Mandela was freed in February 1990, political violence intensified.

However, the main apartheid laws were scrapped and the state of emergency was lifted, leaving the media free to report on this changing struggle and previously banned organisations. Yet there was also increased intimidation and violence against journalists for exposing political violence or being critical of political parties.

Democratic elections finally took place in April 1994. While the preliminary constitution guaranteed freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information, it also provided for an independent regulator for broadcasting.

As regards media leadership at the time, Aggrey Klaaste edited *Sowetan* and Khulu Sibiyi *City Press*, but it was only in 1995 that the first black person was appointed to edit a “white” mainstream newspaper: Moegsien Williams at the *Pretoria News*.

Transformation was happening more quickly in broadcast. A new board was appointed in 1993, and by 1994 the SABC already had black editors, including former *Sowetan* managing editor Joe Thloloe. Black unions became owners of some privatised SABC stations as well as of greenfields radio outlets and TV station e.tv.

The final South African constitution was adopted at the end of 1996, confirming the media freedom provisions of its interim predecessor.

*They are white, they are male, they are from a middle class background, they tend to share a very similar life experience ... (I)n a country whose population is overwhelmingly black (85%), the principal players in the media have no knowledge of the life experience of that majority. – Nelson Mandela, speaking to the IPI in Cape Town, 1994*

## SEPARATE BODIES

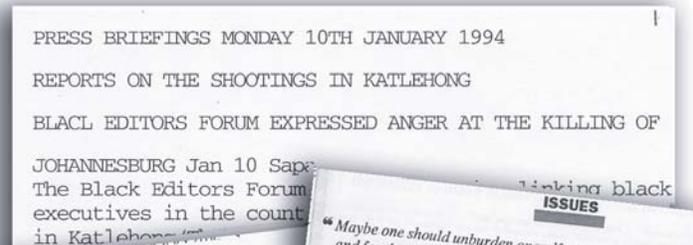
The unions show the divisions among journalists over the years. Most black journalists had belonged to the Writers Association of South Africa (Wasa), which had a black consciousness identity and a high political profile. It became the Media Workers Association of SA (Mwasa) so it could represent all black media workers (including print workers). The South African Society of Journalists (SASJ) had only a small minority of black members.

From two polarised groups – the Black Editors’ Forum (BEF) and the Conference of Editors (CoE) – Sanef was formed in October 1996. BEF members were politicised, inclusive and had strong black consciousness or Africanist approaches, while CoE members were mostly white liberals or apartheid supporters in an exclusive, non-political club of English and Afrikaans newspaper editors.

The BEF was a post-apartheid formation, created in 1992. Given the deficit of black editors, and the aspirations of senior black journalists, this group drew support from ranks below that of editors-in-chief, especially from Mwasa members now in middle-manage-

ment posts. It also extended to print and broadcast media as well as spanning the private/independent and public/state divide. The BEF promoted affirmative action, training, transformation of media ownership and media freedom.

The CoE was a group of the top editors of mainstream newspapers formed in 1981 to unite English and Afrikaans editors for media freedom. It was accustomed to opposing state control of the press. Many of its editors were concerned about the need for constitutional protection, intimidation of journalists by political parties and the use of laws by police to get information from journalists.



*We can expect turmoil in newsrooms as blacks demand a bigger voice in the decisions there ... There will be hard questions about an almost lily-white editorial management team at publications like The Star.* — Joe Thloloe, BEF chairperson, writing in *Rhodes Journalism Review*, July 1994.

## PRESSURE ON EDITORS

Part of the context into which Sanef was born, was a political one of loud criticism of the media, especially from the new political leadership in the country.

Mandela, as ANC president in 1992, said the party valued “a free, independent and outspoken press”. But,



he said, the lack of diversity in control and staffing of the print media led to one-dimensional journalism. Secondly, many white journalists had predicted a storm that had not come, yet continued to be pessimistic. His third area of criticism concerned the lack of excellent journalism. Finally, he strongly criticised black reporters, suggesting their allegiances lay with their white bosses rather than with liberation.

These criticisms put pressure on all editors. White editors felt they were being told it was time to leave. For black journalists, being attacked like this was an added pressure. Even editors sympathetic to the ANC now found that their journalistic independence was under question. However, over time these pressures created a common interest among editors and a shared journalistic idealism.

## FACING THE FUTURE

The challenge for media leaders was to remove the legacies of inequality and discrimination, and to develop racial representativity in content and in staffing.

Along with this, editors needed to define their role in expanding and strengthening democracy, while considering how their freedom related to nation-building in a deeply divided and conflict-torn country.

And then, to add to the load, they had to succeed commercially in an increasingly competitive environment.

Apartheid had fostered deep mistrust, so race would remain a complex and central issue even once Sanef was formed. At the same time, there was the challenge of how to cover the story of the new South Africa, and how to constitute the place of editors within this story itself.

## SANEF'S STALWARTS

The forum relies on the energy of its members. Here are eight who have remained actively involved in Sanef's structures and projects since the first year:

**Paddi Clay** heads the Johncom Pearson Journalism Programme and is responsible for recruitment and developing journalistic talent. She was a copy editor and print reporter before, in 1979, joining newly established Capital Radio. She has been a correspondent for foreign radio networks and programme and news director of 702 Talk Radio. She is a former SAUJ office-bearer. As Sanef education and training convener, she worked closely with the Mappu Seta since its inception. Clay chaired the standards generating body which developed the first national journalism qualification.



**Amina Frense** is Sanef's 2006/7 Gauteng convener, and previously served as Sanef treasurer for a few years. Before joining the SABC, she was foreign correspondent for various television broadcasters abroad and then joined the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism in Johannesburg. She is news assignments editor at the SABC, where she previously held several other positions, including editor: training and development. Frense is actively involved in media advocacy bodies around democratic transformation and freedom of expression in South Africa and the SADC region.



**Raymond Louw** is editor/publisher of current affairs newsletter *Southern Africa Report*. He was *Rand Daily Mail* editor (1966-77) and later SA Associated Newspapers general manager. He worked on newspapers in Sussex, Cumbria and London, and made a plea to the UN Human Rights Commission to entrench press freedom as human right. An IPI fellow and World Press Freedom Committee African representative, active in Sanef, FXI and Misa-SA, he received Misa's 2005 Press Freedom award and co-leads the campaign against Africa's "insult laws".



**Mary Papayya** is the secretary-general of Sanef for 2006/7. She previously served as Sanef's Kwazulu-Natal regional convener for four years and has been on the Sanef council for nine years. She is a former bureau chief of the *Witness*, news editor/executive producer at SABC Radio News and was a founder news manager/editor at East Coast Radio. Papayya is currently the Kwazulu-Natal bureau chief for the *Sowetan* newspaper. She also serves as a southern Africa media trainer specialising in gender, elections and news reporting.



**Judy Sandison** heads the New Media Unit at SABC News, which incorporates the website *sabcnews.com* and other news-on-demand services such as *NewsBreak*. Formerly an award-winning broadcast journalist, parliamentary reporter and regional editor, she is also a gender activist and has done volunteer work for a range of women's rights groups. She was on the editorial collective of *Stir* magazine in the 1980s. Sandison is on the Sanef council, and has served as secretary-general (for three years) and Kwazulu-Natal regional convener.



**Mathatha Tsedu** is the editor of *City Press*. He previously held the following positions: *Sunday Times* editor, deputy head of SABC News, deputy editor of *The Star*, *Sunday Independent* deputy editor, and political editor of *Sowetan*. Tsedu was an active trade unionist and held several top positions in the Media Workers Association of SA (Mwasa). He was the chairperson of Sanef for three consecutive years and still serves on its council. He is presently the chairperson of The African Editors' Forum (Taef).



**Joe Thloloe** is a former editor-in-chief of SABC Television News and of e-tv. He was for many years managing editor of *Sowetan*, and worked before that on the *World*, *Post Transvaal*, *Drum* and the *Rand Daily Mail*. He was detained and jailed several times between 1960 and 1984. Thloloe was a founder member and eventually the president of the Union of Black Journalists (UBJ), and of Mwasa. He was Sanef's first executive director, in an acting capacity, and served two terms as Sanef chairperson: from 2004 to 2006.



**Moegsien Williams** is editor of *The Star*, the flagship title of Independent Newspapers in South Africa, and editorial director of the group. He previously edited the group's Cape Town titles, the *Cape Times* and the *Cape Argus*. Before that, he was Editor of *South*, an independent weekly newspaper which played a key media role in the anti-apartheid era. He has also been managing editor of *Sowetan* and editor of *Pretoria News*. Williams is a previous chairperson of both the International Press Institute and Sanef.



# Looking for common ground

## TIME OF CHANGE

The year 1995 was one of even more intense debate about the role of the media and their conduct in South Africa. To give just a few instances: deputy president Thabo Mbeki, speaking to the BEF, pointed out the print media were still mostly white-owned, edited and written; the ANC attacked the media for their lack of complexity in reporting on transformation; and Gauteng Premier Tokyo Sexwale blasted foreign ownership.

But changes in BEF and CoE membership had started to bridge the polarisation of the two groups.

From 1991 there were four black editors in the CoE: Khulu Sibiyi, Aggrey Klaaste, TG Mthembu and Brij Ramguthie. By 1993 it also had three white men from the alternative press: Franz Krüger, Anton Harber and Guy Berger. By 1996 the CoE had one woman member, Jane Raphaely, among the 29 men.

And in the BEF, Williams, of the *Pretoria News*, was four months later moved to the more influential *Cape Times*. He wrote about a new vision in journalism: along with other areas of transformation, the editors' organisations had to transform too. In 1995 he joined the CoE.

## REVEALING DIFFERENCES

In August 1995, CoE and BEF groups had a joint hearing with the Constitutional Assembly committee dealing with freedom of expression. CoE chair Sibiyi at the last minute said he could not attend, so other CoE members presented a dossier of their concerns. But BEF chair Thami Mazwai took a different tack, calling for constitutional limits on foreign ownership of the press. *Sunday Times* editor Ken Owen so objected to being “neatly confined to

an all-white, middle-aged ghetto”, as he called their delegation, that he resigned from the CoE.

Then Sibiyi resigned as CoE chairperson in September 1995, saying he had failed to unite white and black editors; that CoE members were resisting change.

## BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

At this stage Williams, who was the local International Press Institute (IPI) chairperson, took the initiative. As a member of both editors' groups, he facilitated a private meeting of Mazwai and CoE's acting chair, John Patten, on October 9.

There were soon signs of BEF-CoE co-operation. In December they and the Newspaper Press Union, SAUJ and Mwasa published an advert calling for public suggestions on a mechanism to solve press complaints. It was felt the Press Council was outdated now press freedom was being written into the constitution, and self-regulation by a Press Ombudsman would be more appropriate.

## TALKS BEGIN

But it would take another 10 months of work by BEF-CoE committees to find common ground over establishing a democratic media system.

A meeting of representatives of both groups took place on February 9 1996. Patten, Mazwai and Williams recommended a task group be set up to adopt joint positions, where possible, and iron out problem areas. The CoE had chosen a new chairperson, Harber, to lead their team: as an outspoken editor of the “alternative” press with an anti-apartheid background he would be acceptable to the BEF.

Williams chaired a BEF-CoE task group meeting on March 14 at the Carlton Hotel in Johannesburg. Members discussed a joint bosberaad, affirmative action and training, press freedom, a structure for a new organisation and the idea of a roadshow to promote press freedom values. They recommended the formation of a joint body of editors, senior journalists and those associated with the industry. And they identified an easy area of common ground: media freedom issues.

A statement after the meeting said editors were “gravely concerned at the move by Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe to take direct control of the country's newspapers”. They also agreed South African editors would in future be jointly represented by the BEF and CoE to government and to national and international organisations. Then in March there was a joint statement urging the government to protest against the arrests of the managing director and editor-in-chief of the *Post* in Zambia.

South Africa's mass media has helped to change our world, but internally it has done too little about changing itself. – Moegsien Williams of the

BEF and CoE, writing in 1995

In what turned out to be the last CoE meeting, on July 29, Harber expressed “hope that a new umbrella body will be formed in the near future”. CoE minutes note that Mazwai had “expressed support for a new umbrella body, provided the BEF would continue to exist”.

## DOWN TO WORK

There were now two task force committees: Harber, Williams and Mazwai on membership and construction of the new organisation, and CoE's Raymond Louw and BEF's Mike Tissong on training and an editorial charter.

Finally dates were set: the BEF/CoE Unity Conference would be from October 18 to 20 in Cape Town. October 19 is National Media Freedom Day in South Africa, commemorating the banning in 1977 of the *World* and *Weekend World*.

On one hand it seemed the best that could be achieved was an umbrella body of the two bodies as a watchdog on press freedom, at the other extreme was the possibility they would merge.



# Unity Conference: Oct 1996

## TOUGH TALKING

Unity did not come easily to about 80 journalism leaders who gathered in Cape Town. Some editors, critical of the event, chose to not attend.

Moegsien Williams reminded the meeting that it was the eve of the anniversary of the 1977 bannings of newspapers. “This unprecedented coming together is a considerable achievement indeed,” he said. “This forum should be built about a single pillar of freedom of expression, but providing a roof for a diverse spectrum of media voices.” The conference had come at an opportune time, as the president of the Constitutional Court had criticised the press and needed to be engaged on the matter.

Anthony Sampson, former editor of *Drum*, made opening remarks, highlighting how drawing on diverse experiences was a source of creativity. Referring to the UK, he quipped: “The English are themselves dull, complacent and indifferent, always needing to be bombarded

with other cultures to enliven them.” Sanef was exciting because it drew on two cultures.

From Anton Harber came the appeal that for too long South African journalists had spoken with different voices – but one voice did not mean a centralised voice.

Thami Mazwai described media’s role as being “to protect the freedoms we fought for”. The country was headed for disaster unless media decided to be part of the new society. Sometimes differences were very bitter, but “but one thing we all believe in: media has to be free”.

The conference broke into workshops on media diversity, media freedom, what was then called “affirmative action”, education and training, as well as the structure, goals and activities of a new editors’ forum. On the final morning, resolutions were debated and adopted. These called for Truth Commission hearings to be open and condemned media repression in Zambia.

Mike Tissong, still BEF secretary, described the event: “Editors at the conference conducted themselves with



These are the founding members of Sanef – those who met at Breakwater Lodge



1996: Founding commitments

**PREAMBLE**

Recognising past injustices in the media, we commit ourselves to a programme of action to overcome these injustices and to defend and promote media freedom and independence.

**BELIEF**

It is our belief and understanding that:

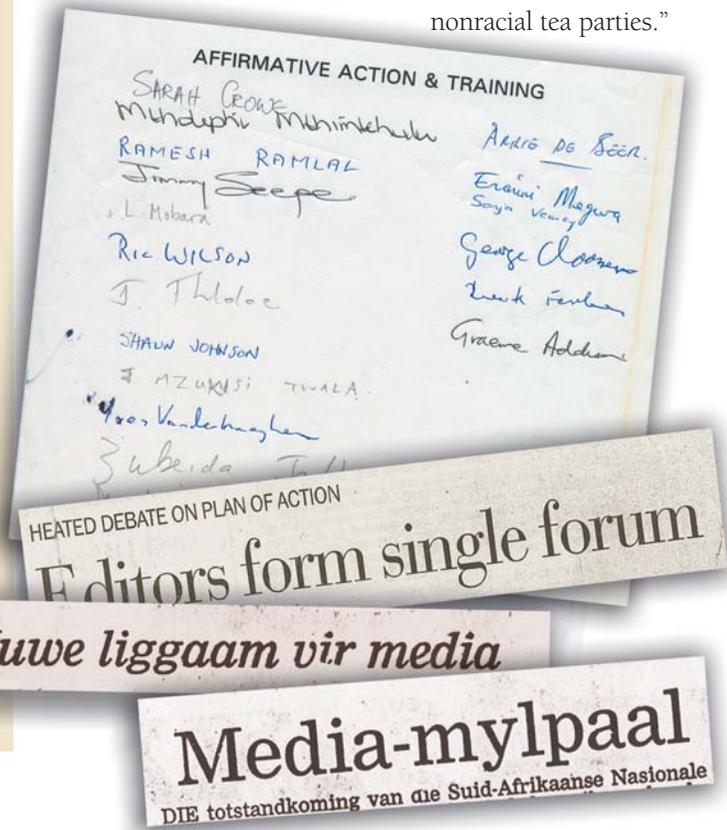
- Public and media scrutiny of the exercise of political and economic power is essential;
- The law related to the operation of media should be consistent with South Africa's Bill of Rights in its protection of freedom of expression;
- Journalists and media owners have a duty to work to the highest professional standards and ethics;
- Journalists and journalism teachers should embrace a learning culture by committing themselves to on-going education and training.

**DECLARATION OF INTENT**

- To nurture and deepen media freedom as a democratic value in all our communities and at all levels of our society;
- To foster solidarity among journalists and to promote co-operation in all matters of common concern;
- To address and redress inappropriate racial and gender imbalances prevalent in journalism and news organisations and encourage corrective action and a transformation of culture within the industry;
- To promote media diversity in the interests of fostering maximum expression of opinion;
- To promote the process of media education and to help aspirant and practising journalists acquire or develop skills;
- To promote professional freedom and independence in broadcast media and all media funded by public authorities;
- To encourage government to ensure transparency and openness in administration and to pass laws ensuring maximum freedom of information;
- To use all available institutions to defend media freedom.

openness not experienced among leaders in the industry before and the hidden agendas that were feared in the run-up to the meeting did not materialise. There were tensions and strong words exchanged, but they were done in the spirit of keeping all eyes on the prize of leaving Cape Town's Breakwater Lodge with an organisation that will express the interests of South African editors."

Deputy President Thabo Mbeki featured as a dinner speaker and said: "Sitting together in Sanef as black and white South Africans we have the rare possibility to influence one another, to impact on one another as equals, to make interventions in our society in ways which will explain why we thought it was ever necessary to come together to form one editors' forum. Surely it cannot be that we formed Sanef so that we could have nonracial tea parties."



**OUTCOMES**

Among the outcomes of the unity meeting were Sanef's "preamble, belief, declaration of intent, organisation and programme of action". This founding document guided the forum until its launch 15 months later.

Its preamble shows a compromise between the BEF focus on transformation and the CoE concern with media freedom, and has a similar ring to the preamble to the South African Constitution.

Big goals and a complex programme of action were set for an organisation that had no staff and whose members had full-time jobs. These included:

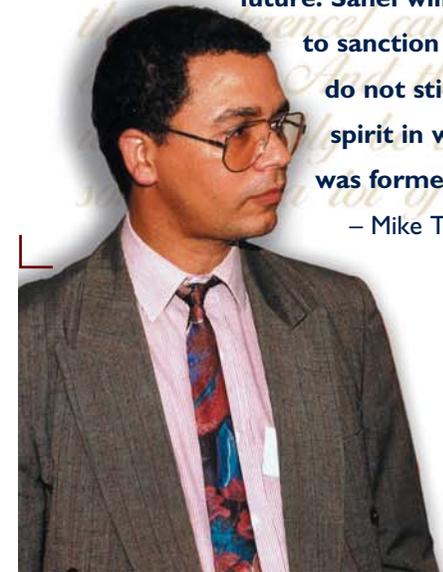
- an annual report on affirmative action;
- strong action on both media freedom and the promotion of diversity;
- redressing race and gender imbalances in journalism and media houses; and
- establishing communication channels with government, the judiciary and other statutory groups.

Sanef's structure was set up. Future councils would be elected without quotas, but the unity meeting chose an interim council based on a formula: five BEF; five CoE; five broadcast; and five others including magazines and educators. The first Sanef leadership was elected: Mazwai as chairperson, Brian Pottinger as deputy and S'bu Mngadi as secretary-treasurer.

An editorial in *Die Burger* afterwards noted that all media branches were now represented in one body and that its cornerstone was press freedom – with the professional development of journalists and corrective action as additional aims. "Sanef's unity did not come without difficulty, but there appears to be greater mutual understanding already," the paper said.

*editors are typically individualistic people with strong opinions, so uniform responses to the commitments [of the conference] can be excluded. And that will probably be the source of a lot of infighting in the future. Sanef will not be able to sanction editors that do not stick to the spirit in which Sanef was formed.*

– Mike Tissong, 1996



**I remember ...**

Breakwater Lodge was a watershed conference. Many of us knew of each other or knew each others' work, but we had never sat down together as a group of senior editors – across race and gender, broadcast and print – to discuss issues of common concern to the journalistic profession.

It started off in a very fragile way, with most of us walking on eggshells and being very careful how we phrased things.

But there was a big, cathartic breakthrough when feelings ran high and discussions got very heated on issues around corrective action, and past injustices to black journalists in particular. Veteran journalist John Battersby stood up and gave a very moving apology as a white journalist to his black colleagues, which went to the very heart of the damage done by apartheid to journalism.

– Judy Sandison

# Setting up Sanef

## THE FIRST COUNCIL

Sanef had a clear programme of action but inherited all the divisive issues of the media and the loud criticisms of the ANC government. It was a fragile unity. The 20 journalism leaders on that first council held a wide variety of strong viewpoints as evident in their meetings with President Mandela. This period saw increased black ownership in media via Times Media Ltd and commercial radio stations: South Africa's editors would have to keep pace with transformation in their own domains.

## SUBCOMS GET GOING

There was a sense of urgency once Sanef was founded. A meeting was quickly secured with President Mandela, and by October 31 council members had been allocated to subcommittees:

- Media Diversity – convened by Mazwai
- Training and Affirmative Action – Pottinger
- Code of conduct and promotion of media freedom – Williams
- Constitution and membership – Tissong

Sanef members were spread all over the country but largely concentrated in Johannesburg. They communicated by phone, fax and sometimes email. When possible, subcommittees met face-to-face.

## MEETINGS BEGIN

The first Sanef council meeting was held in Johannesburg on February 15 1997. It agreed on ambitious proposals, including a roadshow promoting media freedom, a media ethics workshop, an internet site, a workshop on

intern/cadet training schemes, information seminars for journalists and public servants, and fundraising for an office with one staffer. There was no report from the media diversity subcommittee.

Council decided to draft responses for the next meeting with Mandela on anti-media laws and the Open Democracy Bill. It also agreed to call on members to co-operate with the TRC's inquiry into the media – but Sanef as such would not make a submission (See Ch 10).

S'bu Mngadi resigned as he was moving to a corporate job, and Latiefa Mobara was elected secretary-general. Shaun Johnson and Anton Harber also moved to management jobs, so were replaced as CoE representatives on council by Jim Jones and John Battersby.

The second Sanef council meeting was held in Durban on June 7. A draft constitution was adopted and it was noted that pledges of R150 000 had been obtained from media companies to set up the office. A task group was asked to probe the idea of a Media Charter. Mary Papayya joined council to represent radio.

## MANDELA AND JUDGES

Five days after the Unity Conference, on October 25, Mazwai sent council members a fax: "President Mandela has agreed to a meeting with Sanef at 8am on Friday November 1. The committee feels that the meeting should be open to all council members."

On November 1, all but two of the Sanef council met Mandela at the Union Buildings in Pretoria. The President said he hoped more black members would be appointed to the council. The use of Section 205 of the Criminal Procedures Act to compel journalists to disclose sources was among the subjects discussed (See Ch 9), as were the

President's strong criticisms of black journalists. It was agreed to meet every three months to improve government-media communication. The Minister of Safety and Security, Sydney Mufamadi, and police chief George Fivaz also attended.

The Sanef council met Constitutional Court president Judge Arthur Chaskalson and Chief Justice-elect Ismail Mahomed on November 28, and discussions again included Section 205.

Another large Sanef delegation went for a second meeting with President Mandela on June 10 1997. Editors asked him about his public statement in Zimbabwe that black reporters kowtowed to their white bosses and did not express their real opinions. A robust exchange followed. Mandela told them certain journalists were questioning his integrity and in many cases "conservative whites" were still controlling the media.

## INFORMATION EXCHANGES

On March 20 1997, the first of Sanef's series of media-government information exchange seminars was held in Johannesburg. The Health Minister and the Director General of Department of Communications attended, as did officials and 21 journalists from around SA. Another four seminars followed, with a variety of government departments.

At these events, difficulties and expectations about communication were aired in order to reduce misunderstandings. In many cases, the Sanef leadership was frustrated by journalists not turning up, although editors had

promised to send staffers. However, the seminars were noted for having a positive impact on relationships.

## COMTASK CONTRIBUTIONS

In October 1997, the cabinet started to transform the South Africa Communications Services which had controlled state information during apartheid. It accepted the recommendations of "Comtask", a committee including (in their individual capacities) Sanef members Raymond Louw and Mathatha Tsedu. The Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) was set up with Joel Netshitenzhe appointed CEO in February 1998 – another body with which Sanef needed to establish a relationship.

GCIS was not perceived as a threat to the media, which further deflated lingering CoE-style fears of some white editors that an ANC government would suppress or seek to control the media.

It had been an active first year for Sanef. The organisation was also a founder member of the office of the Press Ombudsman. The organisation had moved from embryonic unity to becoming a busy forum with a range of activities.



# First controversies

## AGREEING TO DISAGREE

Before 1996 ended, Sanef started experiencing severe internal differences.

On December 30, the BEF welcomed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's probe into the role of the media in the violation of human rights from 1960 to 1994, but objected to the "proposed preliminary investigations by an intermediary body", the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI), which it felt would favour the English press. The main protagonists were both in Sanef: chairperson Thami Mazwai (BEF) and council member Raymond Louw (FXI). Louw was a former editor of the anti-apartheid, liberal *Rand Daily Mail*. In January 1997 the TRC decided to drop the research.

The issue brought up the question of procedures, and at its first meeting the council agreed to consult members over statements about controversial matters.

In April, Brian Pottinger told the TRC that council had "decided in view of the wide differences in experience, views and attitudes of the members it was unlikely that Sanef, a professional body devoted to improving journalistic standards and defending media freedom, would be in a position to provide a unified submission", but added that it had called on members to co-operate.

This is an example of Sanef members agreeing to disagree and Sanef therefore keeping silent: as a "forum" it cannot always speak with one voice.

## DISPUTE OVER DENEL

On July 25, Sanef condemned arms company Denel for trying to suppress information. Denel had been granted a Pretoria High Court interdict preventing newspapers

from naming Saudi Arabia's involvement in a major arms deal. Legislation used to suppress information during apartheid had been "resurrected" for use by a government committed to transparency, Sanef said. Nevertheless, the *Sunday Independent* publicised the name.

Should editors obey the law because the government is legitimate, or break it because they believe in media freedom? On one level, this was the issue. On another it was whether Sanef's leadership represented all members.

On August 29, Mazwai's column in *Business Day* denounced those editors who had defied the court order. Mazwai was identified as Sanef chairperson. Pottinger and Moegsien Williams sent formal letters of objection. Williams wrote: "Without going into the demerits and merits of the Denel issue, I must distance myself from a paragraph in a column which gave the impression you were speaking on behalf of Sanef. To my knowledge, neither the members of the council nor the management committee of Sanef were consulted about the content of your column."

Mazwai said he believed 80% of Sanef would support him in condemning the editors, but none broke ranks to take his side.

## TRC HEARINGS

At the same time, divisions in the media – interpretations of the past and of what was needed now to build the new South Africa – were being aired in the media in the build-up to the TRC hearings.

Some newspapers and journalists appeared at the TRC media hearings from September 15 to 17. These included representatives for TML and Independent Newspapers – the two big English liberal press groups.



Raymond Louw speaks at the TRC hearings

Sanef member Williams was part of the Independent team. That March he had criticised his former *Cape Argus* editor, John O'Malley, for rejecting the "humble apology" proffered by Independent on behalf of its previous owners, the Argus Company, about discrimination experienced by black journalists.

On September 26, 127 journalists from Nasionale Pers (Naspers), the Afrikaans publishing group, defied their employers by apologising for their role during apartheid. They included some Sanef members.

## MAZWAI RESIGNS

As a result of the Denel issue and range of perceptions voiced at the TRC hearings from Sanef members, public cracks were appearing in Sanef. Pottinger was quoted as saying he hoped Sanef's aims would not be diluted "by major ideological wars among its members". Others said Sanef was not dealing with pertinent issues, or it seemed racist attacks were preventing constructive criticism.

On October 2, Mazwai resigned from Sanef. He said he was disillusioned with many of the white Sanef members. In a letter to Tissing (BEF secretary), Mazwai said: "They do not believe in the media as an integral part of South Africa and, therefore, part and parcel of the country's national objectives. Some even go to the extent of abusing

and heaping contempt on the transformation process and do not even recognise our courts of law. They see the media as a law and an institution unto itself in which they tell South Africa what to do." Mazwai also resigned from the BEF, which would continue to be part of Sanef.

The leadership kept Sanef going and did not counter-attack Mazwai. Instead, it united members around Sanef's new activities – particularly the launch conference.

## NEW CHAIR CHOSEN

Sanef held its third council meeting in Johannesburg two days after the resignation. Williams was chosen as acting chair. Joe Thloloe offered to organise the January 1998 launch and set up an office.

The Media Charter task group – Jim Jones, John Battersby and Mike Siluma – reported that Sanef should not dictate to editors, but each media institution should have a code. They said the "function of Sanef is to provide professional support to editors, rather than act as a policing agency" – this should be left to the courts and independent complaints structures such as the ombudsman.

And, in a sequel to ex-security men telling the TRC there were still many agents in the media, Sanef called for their resignation and "urged any journalists approached in the future to reject and publicise such advances".

# Sanef launch

## MOVING TOWARDS LAUNCH

In its first year, Sanef was frequently in the news. Its members made its internal problems public through their own media.

At the same time, its leadership was changing fast: besides Thami Mazwai, six others left before the end of 1997 because they were no longer editors. Sanef had lost all three of its executives, both BEF and CoE chairpersons and three of the four people pivotal in the unity process. This was part of a fast-changing period for the media, particularly for newspapers, in terms of ownership but also the appointment of black editors.

However, at this time, in November 1997, veteran journalist Joe Thloloe became acting executive director – Sanef’s first employee. He set up the Sanef office and worked towards the launch conference.

Despite the difficulties, Sanef work had continued – including three large events. A Sanef-Independent Newspapers conference on journalism training was held at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, in September and a code of ethics workshop at Peninsula Technikon, Cape Town, in November. Then a conference for educators and trainers was held in January 1998.

But before Sanef’s launch came President Mandela’s harshest criticism yet. At the ANC’s Mafikeng congress in December, where Mbeki was elected party president, Mandela said that most of the mass media opposed the ANC and declared any transformation efforts as an attack on press freedom.

“Thus the media uses the democratic order, brought about by the enormous sacrifices of our own people, as an instrument to protect the legacy of racism,” Mandela told congress.

*A role for Sanef in ensuring racial and gender equity in the media industry was at the very heart of the unity process between the CoE and the BEF. Under no circumstances must this role be diminished or watered down.* – Moegsien Williams, acting Sanef chair, at the launch conference

## LAUNCH CONFERENCE

It was a powerful attack, to which Sanef did not immediately respond. Instead, it was used to give direction and gravity to its launch conference, as well as to establish a “Sanef way of responding” that was confident rather than confrontational.

About 80 editors, senior journalists and journalism trainers, including prominent BEF members, attended the launch at Eskom Centre from January 23 to 25 1998.

The report by Williams as acting chairperson notes the problems of trying to unite the two vastly different bodies of people of different ideologies. Nonetheless, the forum had been set up, three council meetings held and all except the diversity subcommittee had been active.

Williams called Mandela’s December remarks “a watershed event”. He said the President knew the media was changing and vulnerable, so this was “a bid to gain allies by first putting them on the defensive and making them feel they owe a moral debt to the new order in South Africa”. However, he said, independent-minded, critical and professional journalists were many and would not be cowed. In responding to Mandela, Sanef needed to be honest about its shortcomings but give prominence to its “vision of media in a democratic South Africa”.

After workshops, the conference agreed on its resolutions and drew up a detailed programme of action for its four subcommittees.



On the balcony at Eskom Centre

Mike Siluma, *Sowetan* editor, was elected chairperson, with Williams as deputy and Judy Sandison as secretary-general. Siluma said Sanef had decided to see Mbeki in February and Mandela in March, where the emphasis would be on the obligation in the new Constitution to protect the media’s historic role.

## TAKING STOCK

In his column in *Beeld*, editor Arrie Rossouw wrote afterwards that some journalists had feared Sanef would adopt government’s media agenda after receiving such strong criticism, but the opposite had happened. “... South African media is united in an organisation that represents the interests of all interest groups.” Resolutions on both transformation and the watchdog role of journalists had been unanimously adopted.

Sanef’s launch had been imperative, Siluma wrote. “One of the main weaknesses in South African journalism is that there is no credible voice. Some of the loudest voices are white and they are discredited. Black journalists have views but no clout. There is no debate going on and therefore a vacuum.”

### INTRODUCTION to launch resolutions

We, the delegates at the launch conference of the SA National Editors’ Forum, having noted President Nelson Mandela’s remarks at the ANC’s 50th conference as well as other criticism of South African media, remain committed to transforming our industry to represent fully the communities we serve. We reaffirm that South Africa’s new constitution has granted us a historic role to be critical watchdogs, especially over those who wield power in our society. This is a responsibility which we will never shirk.

To this end we bind ourselves to:

- Leading the debate on the issues affecting our industry and society as a whole;
- Developing and defending the integrity and credibility of our industry and profession;
- Forging links with like-minded groups in South Africa, our continent and across the world;
- Representing the profession on legislative and restrictive issues;
- Striving for professional excellence;
- Embarking on a recruitment drive to ensure we represent the full spectrum of our segment of the industry.

# Nat Nakasa award

## SETTING UP THE AWARD

By October 1997 Sanef, Print Media SA's Media Freedom Committee and the Nieman Society of Southern Africa had decided to co-operate in setting up and administering an award for integrity in journalism. This is still the only award Sanef backs and promotes, though it is often approached to endorse or nominate judges for other awards.

Nominations were called for and the first award ceremony was held in 1998, on October 19 – South Africa's Media Freedom Day.

The first award went to writer and broadcaster Jon Qwelane, who had roundly criticised Sanef the previous year but had also

been outspoken on issues of race and the media.

A friend of Nakasa's from the United States, Harold McDougall, spoke at the 2006 ceremony of his personal experiences of the writer whose name is honoured by this award. "Nat was a principled, passionate, courageous person. He wanted freedom and justice not only for his own people, but for everyone. He was quiet and unassuming, easy to know, generous with his time and space. He was also a great listener. It seems to me that a good journalist, like a good social activist or a good leader, must know how to listen. That was Nat."

In 1999, a Sanef council decision to market and build its national status cemented Sanef's commitment to the award.

Other awards have larger prizes, but the Nat Nakasa remains prominent as the only one for integrity. Since 2003, the award-giving ceremony has been held at a dinner during Sanef's mid-year AGM. By 2006, the prize was R20 000 and a certificate.

*Mine is the history of the Great Trek, Gandhi's passive resistance, the wars of Cetshwayo, and the dawn raids that gave us the treason trials of 1956. All these are South African things. They are part of me.*

– Nat Nakasa, 1965

## WHY NAT NAKASA?

Nakasa was a South African journalist who died in exile at the age of 28. He was awarded the Nieman Fellowship in 1964 and left South Africa on an exit permit because the government would not give him a passport to travel to the United States. After completing his year of studies at Harvard University he moved to New York, where he grew increasingly homesick and isolated. He committed suicide on July 14 1965.

Nathaniel Nakasa was born in 1937. He moved to Johannesburg to follow his dream to be a journalist: he contributed to the *Golden City Post*, was an assistant editor of *Drum* and the first black columnist on the *Rand Daily Mail*.

By 1963 when he founded a literary journal, *The Classic*, he was a prominent journalist, known for his particular writing style, subtle humour and independent views that crossed race and political barriers to expose racial prejudice and black oppression.

### THE WINNERS: 1998 TO 2006

- 1998** Jon Qwelane, writer and broadcaster
- 1999** Mzilikazi wa Afrika, *Sunday Times* investigative journalist
- 2000** Mathatha Tsedu, deputy editor of *The Star*
- 2001** *Sunday Times* investigative team André Jurgens, Jessica Bezuidenhout and Mzilikazi wa Afrika
- 2002** Justin Arenstein, founding editor of *African Eye News Service*
- 2003** Debbie Yazbek, *The Star's* chief photographer
- 2004** Buks Viljoen, investigative reporter of the *Lowvelder*
- 2005** Veteran photographer Alf Kumalo
- 2006** Guy Berger, head of the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University



Sanef members and guest at the 2005 award-giving ceremony

# Old laws and new laws

## WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

The Unity Conference resolved that Sanef would establish communications with the judiciary and use “all available institutions to defend media freedom, including the Constitutional Court, parliamentary bodies and the Public Protector”.

The problem has been that many apartheid era laws are still on the statute books. At the same time, new laws are being introduced and Sanef needs to ensure that these are in line with the Constitution and its own vision of media freedom.

Since 1996, Sanef has been working on:

- Media law reform – especially Section 205 of the Criminal Procedure Act.
- Input on new laws – submitting views to parliament.

While the forum has been a highly vocal watchdog in these areas, its energy has reduced the threats rather than eliminating them entirely.

## SECTION 205

Section 205 of the Criminal Procedure Act was used by the apartheid government to subpoena journalists to reveal the identities of confidential sources – in those days often linked to banned liberation groups.

Concerns about this provision were raised with President Mandela in 1996, and he undertook to follow up if Sanef submitted a list of offending laws. Section 205 was also discussed with the Constitutional Court judge president and Chief Justice-elect when Sanef met them in 1996.

However, by the time the council had its second meeting in 1997, it was becoming clear that the authori-

ties would not scrap 205 entirely. A “just cause” exemption would have to be argued on a case-by-case basis to show that giving up names would jeopardise the right to media freedom. Raymond Louw was consulting lawyers on this option.

Events, however, ran ahead. In 1998, the forum had to call for the withdrawal of a summons by the Western Cape Attorney-General to photographers to testify as state witnesses in a case about the mass killing of gang leader Rashaad Staggie.

The press statement from Sanef said: “Journalists cannot be expected to give evidence that can place their lives at risk.”

## TEMPORARY SOLUTION

Sanef then met the Attorney General, Justice Minister Dullah Omar and Safety and Security Minister Sydney Mufamadi in 1998. A committee of four was set up, and drew up a proposal for an interim agreement.

However, just days after the meeting, three Cape Town editors were issued subpoenas to give evidence and hand over material in the Staggie case. They publicly refused to co-operate.

Nevertheless, on February 19 1999, a “Record of Understanding” was signed between the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Safety and Security, the National Director of Public Prosecutions and Sanef. It noted a need to continue to negotiate on 205.

In the meantime, when the state wanted a journalist to testify or hand over materials, the decision would first be cleared by the National Director of Public Prosecutions – which office would also attempt to mediate before any subpoena was issued.

## PROBLEMS PERSIST

Despite the Record, on Media Freedom Day 2000 media houses were raided by the Scorpions looking for information on the Staggie case. Sanef met Bulelani Ngcuka, National Director of Public Prosecutions, who had issued the search warrants. This meeting discussed, without accord, the difficulty in balancing the need to fight crime with journalists’ right to protect sources and information.

Sanef in 2000 again found itself condemning subpoenas – this time against the SABC and Reuters concerning the video material on Staggie’s death. The issue dragged on, and seven months later Sanef issued another statement supporting Reuters and APTN: police were still trying to get video tapes. A month later, it welcomed a high court decision setting aside the attempts.

*“We go into situations where we present ourselves as journalists and people allow us into these situations because they know we will respect their confidentiality. If we are called to testify, then we may as well be police consultants.” – Mathatha Tsedu, Sanef chairperson, in 2001*

At this point, Sanef editors felt so strongly that, in June 2001, 40 of them protested outside the Cape High Court before the appearance of their deputy chairperson, *Die Burger* editor Arrie Rossouw. He had applied for the withdrawal of a search warrant (apparently to obtain photos of the Staggie killing). Sanef repeatedly argued that journalists should not be put in the role of police informers nor do police work, because this damaged their ability to gather information in the public interest.



## LISTING THE OLD LAWS

Back in 1998, Sanef put out a statement welcoming the “Bogoshi judgment”, an Appeal Court ruling on defamation. This supported the media freedom approach of the Constitution: the media no longer had to prove information was true, just that they had taken reasonable care in gathering and publishing it.

But there remained the archaic anti-media provisions still on the statutes. In April 1999, Sanef contracted the Centre for Applied Legal Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand to compile a list of the problematic laws. With funding from the Freedom Forum, the work was completed by May 2000. Williams and Ryland Fisher then briefed the Communications Portfolio Committee in parliament, and called on the government to speed up reviewing the anti-media laws. Sanef also held workshops to brief journalists.

Two years later, a meeting was held with the Justice Minister and a task group formed to review the laws. They decided that the state’s Law Commission should come up with proposals – but nothing happened.

## TAKING UP THE ISSUE AGAIN

With its own lack of progress noted, in August 2005 Sanef met the new Justice Minister, Brigitte Mabandla. On the laws, it was decided her director-general would follow up with the Law Commission. On Section 205, Sanef was asked to suggest new wording. A media lawyer advised the forum to consider the “just cause” or “just excuse” defence, and qualified privilege for journalists.

However, by 2006 the law was still unchanged. Subpoenas continued to be issued, despite the minister reaf-

firming the 1999 Record. In addition, civil actions were considered by the courts in 2005 and 2006 in terms of which private entities wanted papers to reveal sources.

Old laws such as the National Key Points Act are also occasionally invoked by the authorities to block journalists’ access. In July 2006 Sanef committed itself, again, to seeking resolution.

## COMMUNICATION AND COURTS

Where Sanef did see progress was in access to the courts. Editors attended a judges’ colloquium in Kempton Park in August 2001, and in 2002 further discussions were held in the Eastern Cape and with Constitutional Court judges. The outcomes included judges allowing TV cameras for public interest cases and issuing summaries of complex cases to encourage more accurate reporting.

In late 2005, Constitutional Court judges initiated another consultation. They welcomed coverage about alleged racism in the Western Cape judiciary, and said they did not mind being criticised in the media.

Where Sanef has not made headway is in the understanding several judges have about media freedom: several cases have seen pre-publication interdicts granted.



## LEGAL TRAINING

A media law workshop on defamation and contempt was taken to the regions in 2002/3. It was run by media lawyer Glenn Penfold for the Law Society of South Africa. In 2005, the Gauteng region hosted a breakfast talk by Penfold on recent High Court defamation judgments and circulated his briefing on the sub judice rule.

Sanef also commissioned a court reporting handbook in cooperation with the Association of Independent Publishers, with funding from the MAPP Seta. It was launched in August 2006.

## NEW LAWS

The first new law discussed by Sanef was the Open Democracy Bill in 1997. In 2000, the forum was briefed by the Institute for Democracy in SA (Idasa) on draft freedom of information legislation, and it subsequently attempted to promote the use by journalists of what became the Promotion of Access to Information Act (Paia).

In 2001, Sanef made a submission to parliament on the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA). The next year, Sanef members spoke at the MDDA hearings, successfully emphasising that the minister had too much control and stressing that training was an important issue.

During 2002, statements were put out on the Broad-



cast Amendment Bill. In input at hearings, the forum successfully urged MPs to entrench editorial independence at the SABC. It failed in its advice to avoid terms like “responsible” and “national interest” in regard to journalism.

After the 2003 AGM, Sanef called for the withdrawal of the Anti-Terrorism Bill. It sent a submission of its concerns and was represented at the hearings.

In 2005, there was a submission on the Convergence Bill, concerning excessive ministerial powers. The Icasa Amendment Bill elicited a similar Sanef response later that year. In 2006, a letter to President Mbeki voiced Sanef’s concerns about the law’s constitutionality. (His office later dispatched the Act back to parliament, requiring MPs to reduce the Minister’s powers to appoint councillors of the independent regulator.)

In July 2006, Sanef noted concerns about phone records of journalists being handed over by cellphone companies under the new legislation and in August it made submissions on the Film and Publications Amendment Bill.

# Race threatens Sanef

## RESEARCHING RACE

Race and gender equity had been a central and controversial issue during the BEF-CoE talks. At its Unity Conference Sanef committed itself to overcoming these past injustices in the media. How to do this would however prove a problem – one that would within a few years create a crisis.

The Training and Corrective Action subcommittee (they later separated into two groups) wanted to measure the extent of the problem, so they wrote to the human resources departments of all the mainstream media companies asking for their affirmative action policies and staff profiles.

The subcommittee met regularly, but reported that it was difficult to get information: by mid-1997 only TML, Independent and the SABC had responded. It sent out another round of questionnaires, but still failed to get full information. Getting information has continued

to be a problem in Sanef's attempt to research and assess corrective action.

One of the things that Thami Mazwai said when he resigned in October 1997 was that white members debated things at Sanef but did not implement them. He told *City Press* that he believed the BEF should remain for 20 years to give “encouragement, strength and support” as “no black journalist can survive in these nonracial organisations unless he becomes a ‘coconut’ [white on the inside]”.

At the end of October, when the TRC handed the first edition of its report to President Mandela, it distinguished between the roles of Afrikaans and English media but said both were guilty of “the racism that pervaded most of white society”.

“Quite often, one has to be black and African, with all the hurt and indignity of the past uppermost in one’s mind, to be able to recognise racism.” – Five black editors’ statement to the HRC

## SANEF MEETS HRC

The Sanef executive met Barney Pitso Moseneke and Jody Kollapen of the HRC on January 13 1999. Sanef said it would ask its members to co-operate, though there were wide differences of opinion. The HRC said it hoped it would not need to use its powers of subpoena. Both parties hoped re-education, sensitisation, dialogue and debate around race would result.

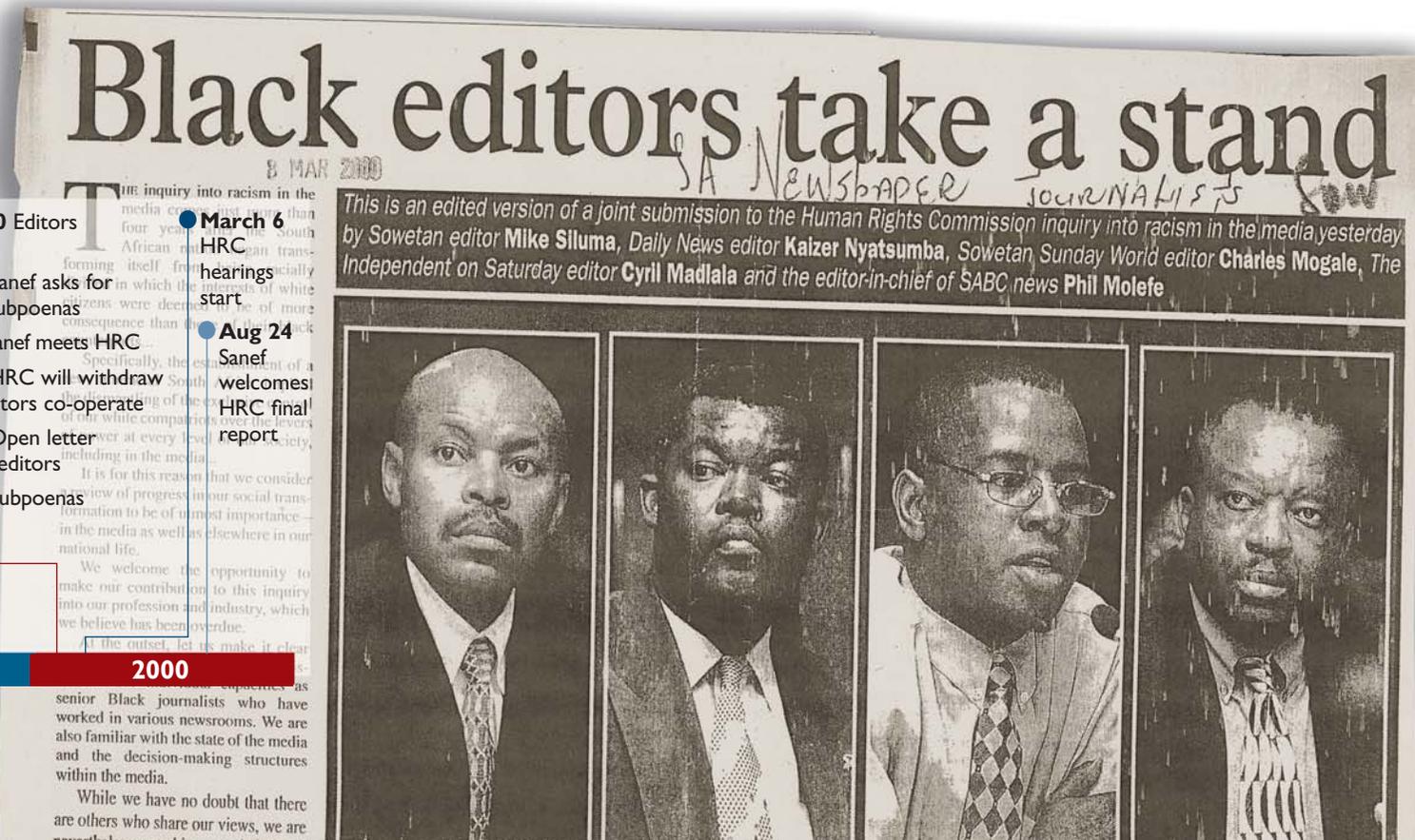
After the meeting, the HRC published its draft terms of reference and was criticised for appointing a white researcher and white media monitoring group to probe racism.

On November 22 the HRC released its preliminary study, what the media called “the Braude Report”, and said at least 30 senior journalists would have to testify at

## HRC RACISM INQUIRY

In November 1998 the Human Rights Commission (HRC) announced its probe into racism in the media – an event which would have a strong impact on Sanef. It had received a request from the Black Lawyers’ Association and the Association of Black Accountants to probe the *Mail & Guardian* and *Sunday Times* for racist coverage. It decided instead to look at all media. There were a variety of media reactions: from welcoming it as something that would help towards unbiased reporting, to fears it would promote racial tensions or a witchhunt.

Sanef had avoided taking a position around the TRC inquiry, but could not sidestep what the HRC stirred up.



- **November 1998** HRC announces media racism probe
- **January 1999** Sanef meets with HRC
- **February 2000** Editors subpoenaed
- **February 12** Sanef asks for withdrawal of subpoenas
- **February 21** Sanef meets HRC
- **February 23** HRC will withdraw subpoenas if editors co-operate
- **February 24** Open letter from five black editors
- **February 28** Subpoenas withdrawn
- **March 6** HRC hearings start
- **Aug 24** Sanef welcomes HRC final report
- **November** HRC releases preliminary “Braude report”
- **December** Sanef workshop on report



*breakwater lodge*

**I remember ...**

We were in Cape Town in a council meeting when the message came through that editors had been subpoenaed to appear at the HRC hearings.

We went into defensive mode, and cried media freedom! Joe Thloloe was the voice of reason. He reminded us the HRC was a legitimate constitutional structure which was just doing its job. The next few days were most frustrating as we looked for a solution. Many heated and emotional teleconferences later, it became clear we had to find a way to co-operate. Mike Siluma and Ryland Fisher argued we could not defy the HRC and retain the public's respect.

A delegation was assembled to meet the HRC. It was going to be a difficult meeting. The commission was clearly unhappy with our “media freedom under threat” statements. Commissioner Pansy Tlakula told me in unequivocal terms, the day before, how shocking and irresponsible she found our utterances. Then I got a bombshell of a call from Thami Mazwai: “Lakela, how far are you guys prepared to go in defence of white supremacy?”

The meeting was difficult but went well, thanks to Dr Barney Pitso Moseneke's fine leadership. Agreement was reached for editors to testify. – **Lakela Kaunda**



Scenes at  
the HRC  
hearings  
in 2000

hearings in January. On December 7 there was a good turnout of editors to a Sanef workshop to examine the report. A statement afterwards pointed out the research was flawed and urged the HRC not to use its subpoena and search powers. The HRC later noted that media reaction to the report had mostly been negative.

## HRC ISSUES SUBPOENAS

At its February 2000 meeting, council was told that editors had been subpoenaed to appear before the HRC to answer allegations that they had offended against the Bill of Rights by being racist. No specific violations were cited and they were asked to give information on their policies. As seen previously (Ch 9), for some editors subpoenas sparked off fears of media repression.

On February 12 Sanef asked the HRC to withdraw subpoenas against 36 newspapers, on the basis that they contravened media freedom clauses in the Constitution but also because this confrontational method would not lead to corrective action. At the same time, Sanef issued its own plan of action on racism: regional workshops, a national workshop on codes of conduct and ethics, a handbook, debates in the media, and contributions to the national and international racism conferences.

## SANEF EDITORS SPLIT

Some editors, such as Kaizer Nyatumba in his column of February 23, said subpoenas were not in themselves a threat to press freedom as the HRC was not a government body, but that the HRC should not have pushed for confrontation when dialogue was possible.

Sanef chair Lakela Kaunda with others on council met the HRC on February 21. By February 23 the HRC said it would withdraw the subpoenas if all media pledged to take part – Sanef responded that it could only make a recommendation.

This had become a public and political issue, and the HRC met various groups, including newspaper owners.

On February 24, five black editors in an open letter said they would attend the hearings whether subpoenas were withdrawn or not. They were Nyatumba (*Daily News*), Mike Siluma (*Sowetan*), Cyril Madlala (*Independent on Saturday*), Charles Mogale (*Sowetan Sunday World*) and Kaunda (*Evening Post*). They said they were expressing themselves as black editors as it seemed black editors had no problem with taking part in the hearings: they were more concerned about the media's reputation than the subpoenas. Siluma was the past chair of Sanef; Kaunda was current chairperson and Nyatumba had just

withdrawn from Sanef. Although Kaunda did not, as Mazwai had in 1996, make this statement as Sanef chair, she was identified in media reports as such. This was a problem for Sanef as its members had a variety of views. The divisions threatened to split Sanef permanently.

On February 28, with hearings due on March 1, the HRC withdrew the subpoenas in the expectation of voluntary co-operation by editors.

## AT THE HEARINGS

The hearings were held in Braamfontein, Johannesburg. In opening, the HRC thanked Sanef and newspaper proprietors “for ultimately making these hearings possible in a different atmosphere than might otherwise have been”.

When the five editors made their submission, Kaunda's name had been replaced by that of Phil Molefe (SABC News), a Sanef founding member. Amongst other things, they were concerned about the minority of blacks, particularly Africans, in key decision-making positions: “the majority of top editors are white”, they said, and the pace of transformation was slow. The white viewpoint dominated public debate because of these editors, and the more influential papers were still aimed at white audiences. They also gave examples of racism in media

content, noting it was often subliminal.

Sanef's submission was made by deputy chair Ryland Fisher. He emphasised that racial divisions were greater than Sanef had realised and it would take active steps to tackle transformation, even if there was a danger of causing division among editors. Kaunda's separate submission was on gender issues.

Other Sanef members were also involved. Joe Thloloe was appointed as an expert on the HRC panel and Guy Berger presented a critique of the two research reports. Other editors made submissions on behalf of their media.

The airing of grievances by black editors was cathartic for them, and educational for their white counterparts. These outcomes reduced the polarisation.

## FAULTLINES

On August 24 2000, Sanef welcomed the HRC's final report – noting that it had moved from making accusations and contained “well-considered and helpful” recommendations. It accepted the challenges but was concerned about a suggestion that the voluntary codes of print media institutions would be strengthened by legislation, pointing out that it had a self-regulatory ombudsman in place.

# Reuniting with new direction

## BACK TO FRAGILITY

For Sanef, 1999 started and ended with the HRC inquiry into racism in the media, but there had been much other activity. Particular successes were the Record of Understanding (see Ch 9), linking violence against women and HIV/Aids in minds of editors, and the signing of an election code of conduct by politicians.

But transformation came to the fore for Sanef as the new century began. The HRC inquiry precipitated Sanef's biggest challenge so far, revealing a split in editors' views on the heritage of apartheid. Had Sanef been ignoring this emotive issue for the sake of unity, and would this lapse now prove fatal? For Sanef, the HRC inquiry was a test of unity – but even more of leadership.

Sanef was back in the headlines, but with such publicly declared divisions, including the position taken by its chairperson, that the future of the forum was not clear.

However, the HRC process had eventually culminated in a reduction of race tensions, greater race sensitivity within the media and additional black advancement within newsrooms. Even sceptical editors had also come to accept the legitimacy of the HRC's inquiry, and were reassured when its recommendations posed no substantive threat to media freedom. Rebuilding Sanef could commence.

## TACKLING THE CRISIS

On April 1 2000, a workshop was held to decide how Sanef should proceed – the organisation was dysfunctional because of the tensions, members at the workshop noted. Besides race and transformation splits, the forum

had lost public support as it seemed to be pushing freedom of expression over equality. Perhaps the organisation was too polite about its diversity instead of having vigorous debate? Press freedom had been the focus: that focus had to change, the workshop resolved.

Sanef's executive director, former council member Latiefa Mobarra (appointed mid-1998), now directed most of her efforts in this area.

Sanef joined the HRC's steering committee to plan the national racism conference for later in the year. A stakeholders' questionnaire was sent to members, a panel discussion on "racism and transformation in the media – where to?" was held on World Media Freedom Day (May 3) and a survey was done of transformation in the training sector.

Then at its council meeting on May 20, members went through a strategic repositioning exercise facilitated by transformation consultant Mandla Letlape.

## AGM 2000

The repositioning ideas were taken to the AGM, held in Johannesburg from July 21 to 23. Letlape helped members define the forum's vision, mission, goals and values (see poster on the right), and choose how to make Sanef more effective – in particular it was decided to set up regional structures.

Sanef had started out with three aims: media freedom, quality journalism and diversity. With the 2000 AGM their order of importance changed, with media freedom moving to third place and quality at the top of the list. The new mission stressed the need for the forum to be a place of debate.

Sanef had lost a few members, but had refocused. A

workshop for members was held in Johannesburg on June 23, to give them tools to tackle transformation and racism in newsrooms. After the 2000 AGM, a Sanef statement said the ongoing training of journalists should be connected to both transformation and improving standards. Before the end of the year, this issue was tackled again at a colloquium organised with Rhodes University titled "Training for media transformation and democracy", and held in Johannesburg from October 18 to 20.

Overseeing Sanef activities after the AGM was a new leadership: Mathatha Tsedu as chairperson, Arrie Rossouw as deputy and Elizabeth Barratt as secretary-general. Their challenge was to keep Sanef united and active around the new vision.



Mathatha Tsedu, Stephen Wrottesley and Latiefa Mobarra

## I remember ...

The first strategy session was an eye-opener because most participants were not prepared to deal with the facilitated strategic discussion. The chairperson was taken to task for not informing members that the meeting had changed from a normal executive meeting to a strategy meeting.

This however was only the tip of the iceberg. The learned editors rejected my methodology and demanded they had a proven way of doing strategy. An hour into this was enough for them to ask me to rather use the method I had prepared. During the session it became clear that the merger into Sanef had been done superficially, to convince the country there were no longer any racist divisions in the fourth estate. I had to traverse between two critical objectives: press freedom and transformation of the media industry. Sanef members were blind to the fact that an organisation like theirs was duty bound to reflect both in its vision and mission.

Our strategy session succeeded when both black and white members saw that both of their constituencies must pursue both objectives with the same energy and vigour.  
– Mandla Letlape



# Tensions with government

## EARLY RELATIONSHIPS

In its first years, Sanef had tough-talking meetings with President Mandela (see Ch 5). Deputy President Mbeki spoke at the Unity Conference (Ch 4) and workshops were held with journalists and government departments. There were strong criticisms of the media from these two men and other politicians – mostly on lack of transformation, but also on the media not adopting a “positive” or “nation-building” approach. As the decade progressed, criticisms focused more on lack of both accuracy and coverage of the “good” things government was doing, and there were accusations of political bias.

## RANGE OF TALKS

Sanef has throughout continued to interact with government ministers and departments on various issues:

- Its executive director took part in Print Media Development Agency meetings in 1999, and a proposal on a state system by the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) was distributed for comment. Devan Pillay of GCIS did a presentation on media diversity to the Sanef council, and in early 2001 Sanef contributed to a paper on the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA).
- Deputy President Jacob Zuma spoke at the 1999 AGM dinner, urging editors to be “constructive, developmental, educational, transformative and generally positive about our future”.
- Gauteng Premier Mbhazima Shilowa spoke at the November 1999 council meeting.
- In 2000 Joel Netshitenzhe, CEO of GCIS, spoke on a panel for World Media Freedom Day on the topic of

racism and transformation in the media.

- In 2001, Gauteng, Western and Eastern Cape editors were briefed in their regions by Defence Minister Mosiuoa Lekota on the arms deals.
- Western Cape members attended a breakfast meeting with the Minister for Intelligence Services, Lindiwe Sisulu, in 2001.
- Sanef organised a briefing with the Environment and Tourism, Trade and Industry and Water Affairs ministers on the 2003 World Summit for Sustainable Development in 2002.
- With attacks on media in Zimbabwe, and concern about elections soon to happen there, in February 2002 Sanef met Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Aziz Pahad.

However, in recent years the forum has found it more difficult to access certain ministers and has been “bounced down” the hierarchy in several instances.

## NOT ON COMMITTEES

At times, Sanef has been asked to represent the media on government committees. This issue arose in 1999 in relation to a committee to advise the Minister of Communications, and later for a committee to advise on HIV/Aids. Sanef decided not to take seats on such committees: there was the danger of being in a minority and outvoted on decisions its members did not agree with.

## INTOLERABLE MISTRUST

However, from about five years into the new South Africa, tensions increasingly plagued media-national government interaction, with mutual antagonism rising and



Editors have their photo taken with President Mbeki after their meeting in March 2001

a possible breakdown in communication looming.

In March 2001, the Sanef executive met President Mbeki at the Union Buildings in Pretoria to discuss this sense of disengagement – and for him to talk more generally with a large group of editors. Sanef proposed the idea of holding a joint workshop, the President agreed, and GCIS was given the task of working with the forum to organise this.

After many meetings, both with GCIS and within Sanef, draft position papers were exchanged. Sanef’s AGM that year included workshops to prepare the forum’s presentation.

## SUN CITY INDABA

On June 29 and 30 2001, a top-level meeting between the President, cabinet ministers and Sanef editors was held at Sun City. Its title was: “The role of the media in a changing society.”

The meeting started in the late afternoon, after Sanef editors had met and exchanged heated and diverse opinions about what could be expected. Editors who had not been Sanef members signed up quickly, so that they could attend the event. Some ministers arrived bearing large and ominous-looking files of papers. The mood was tense and formal.

Everyone sat at desks arranged in curved rows around the podium, with editors dominating the back rows. At a small table upfront sat President Mbeki and Sanef chairperson Tsedu, both looking more relaxed than most and the latter still wearing his customary cap.

In his opening speech, Tsedu noted that both parties were indispensable to democratic change, and needed a robust partnership – but “the present level of mistrust and animosity has gone beyond a tolerable and acceptable point”.

He stated frankly: “As Sanef, we concede there’s too much shallowness, superficiality and unprofessionalism



**Cabinet ministers and Sanef members gather for a photo near the end of the Sun City meeting, 2001**

### I remember ...

The start at Sun City had been heated, with no punches pulled. Howard Barrell (*Mail&Guardian* editor) had been one of the more vociferous, though the definition of our role as opposition to government was claimed by *Financial Mail* editor Caroline Southey.

The night was to produce a drinking group, known as the Group of 14 or some such number, which included Henry Jeffreys (*Beeld*) and Trevor Manuel (Minister of Finance). They hit their beds (separately) only at about 4 am, by which time many of the days' fights had been resolved.

At the end of the indaba all of us gathered at one side of our big room, under the chandeliers, for the group photo. Howard had argued loudly with Essop Pahad (Minister in the Presidency) during the meeting, but the two men were standing next to each other when the photographer said he was battling to get everyone into the frame.

Please squash up, he asked us – so we all moved closer together. And Howard ended up on Essop's lap. "Hey look," someone quipped, "Howard has become Essop's lapdog!"

– **Mathatha Tsedu**

in the South African media". But on the other side government was communicating inadequately, not properly articulating policies and resorting too easily to media-bashing when failures were reported, he said.

Mbeki set the tone in the opening session: "I was told not to bring any ties and suits and things like that, because the intention is to make the meeting as relaxed as possible to allow for a vigorous and frank and open interaction as is possible among ourselves and I think that's a good thing."

He noted that, around the world, media covered South Africa well because it was seen as a "pilot project" in change and problem-solving – and that locally media and government had to interact within this complex situation.

"We will disagree and fight and quarrel about many things. But perhaps the occasion today and tomorrow might give us a possibility to agree on some things, not on content but on the manner in which we work as government and the manner in which we work as the media. That might help."

## FINDING A WAY FORWARD

The following day, the meeting broke up into six commissions for detailed discussions: Economic; Social; Justice; Governance and Administration; International; and Freedom of Expression and of the Media.

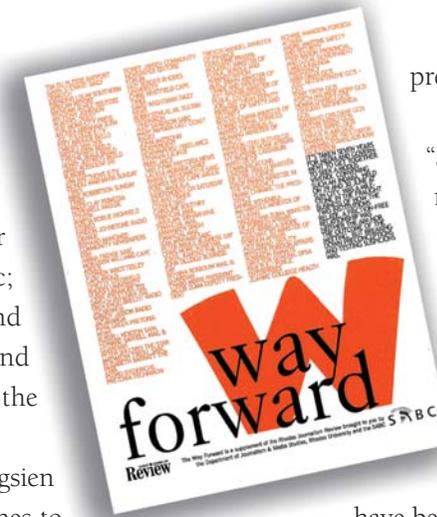
A joint team, including Moegsien Williams, worked behind the scenes to collate all the viewpoints and gave a final presentation after the report-backs. Its introduction read: "All delegates noted the spirit of robust, candid and open dialogue ... This spirit forms a milestone in building trust ... we believe the lesson is that dialogue should become a continuous and ongoing feature of our democracy." It was also noted that all had taken the Constitution as the starting point of talks.

A draft "Way forward" document was debated but not finalised – though in general both Sanef and the ministers committed themselves to various actions to improve relationships and enhance communication.

This document was put through a consultation process in Sanef, and over the next years many activities related to these commitments. After the meeting, members reported an easing of tensions.

## PROVINCIAL 'SUN CITIES'

By the end of 2002, the idea of Sanef having educational workshops with officials at provincial government level was being implemented. In Kwazulu-Natal, meetings were held in 2003 with department and communications heads. In the Central region, meetings were held with media liaison officers in Kimberley and Bloemfontein. A



provincial meeting was held in North West.

Although Sanef members suggested a "Sun City 2" meeting with national government be held in 2003, this remains under discussion.

## SINCE THEN – PPC AND PGA

The Presidential Press Corps (PPC) and Press Gallery Association (PGA) have been hot potatoes for years in Sanef.

The idea of creating the PPC arose after the President was asked at Sun City to give media more access to him. Some Sanef members agreed to liaise with government on this – and after many arguments, by June 2002, it was agreed to locate the initiative outside of Sanef. The formation of the PPC continued to be controversial, especially when there was a demand for special security clearances. Later, a seeming lack of will on both sides to finalise arrangements was experienced. The PPC was officially launched in April 2003 but never operated – by mid-2006 Sanef noted this was now probably dead.

PGA problems of losing their parliamentary offices have been in and out of Sanef since 2001. The PGA, representing those reporting on parliament in Cape Town, is independent of Sanef. However, many managers of PGA members are Sanef editors, who brought the issue to Sanef meetings. There were concerns about whether relocated parliamentary writers would still be able to their jobs.

Sanef was briefed by the Secretary of Parliament and PGA leadership in 2004 and 2005. By July 2006, the conflict over where reporters would be housed, off the grounds of parliament, and under what conditions had led to a breakdown in communications and Sanef was urged by members to meet the officers of parliament to resolve this issue.

# Keeping freedom in the news

## EDITORS IN PROTEST

Editors who take to the streets toyi-toyi like any other protesters. They are making the news – and they get their reporters to cover such events.

Three times, Sanef members have decided on public protest. In 2001, editors supported colleague Arrie Rossouw (see Ch 9). Twice before, they took to pavements outside embassies in support of colleagues in Zimbabwe and Liberia.

## CONFRONTING OR WELCOMING

Sanef has always had a loud voice when journalists are under threat, issuing statements to alert members and encouraging them to give coverage. However, the forum also welcomes events that support media freedom.

Over the years, whenever Sanef issues a statement, those involved know they will be inundated with calls from journalists – including those from radio stations wanting comment in South Africa's 11 official languages.

## JOINT ACTION

At times, Sanef has tackled media freedom issues with other media bodies: the Freedom Forum, Media Workers Association of SA (Mwasa), SA Union of Journalists

(SAUJ), Forum of Black Journalists (FBJ), Foreign Correspondents Association (FCA), International Press Institute (IPI), Media Institute of Southern Africa (Misa) and Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI).

## CONTINENTAL SUPPORT

Sanef has supported editors throughout Africa – starting at the Unity Conference when it spoke out on arrests in Zambia (see Ch 4). Statements issued include:

**1998** – Supporting an FXI/IPI/Misa statement calling for the release from prison of Pius Njawe in Cameroon.

**1999** – With IPI, condemning the detention of three staffers of *The Standard* in Zimbabwe. Expressing outrage at the arrest of four journalists of the *Zimbabwe Mirror*.

**2000** – Condemning the detention of journalists in Liberia on charges of espionage – this was followed by a protest outside the Liberian Embassy in Pretoria with Mwasa, SAUJ, FBJ and the FCA. Reacting to the closure of Capital Radio in Zimbabwe. Reacting to the murder of journalist Carlos Cardoza in Mozambique.

**2001** – Reacting when a bomb destroyed the printing press of the independent *Daily News* in Zimbabwe – Sanef then organised a protest outside the Zimbabwe High Commission in Pretoria with Mwasa, SAUJ and FBJ.

**2001** – Objecting to attacks on media freedom in Namibia, Botswana and Swaziland, including governments withdrawing adverts or ordering public servants not to buy certain publications. Condemning the arrest of Zimbabwean *Daily News* editor Geoff Nyarota.

**2005** – Stating that media repression did not bode well for fair parliamentary elections in Zimbabwe. Calling on Zimbabwe to return the confiscated passport of *Mail&Guardian* owner Trevor Ncube.



Sanef, Mwasa, SAUJ and FBJ protest outside the Zimbabwe High Commission in 2001

## INSIDE SOUTH AFRICA

Sanef's statements on media-related issues inside the country include:

**1997** – Speaking out against commercial pressures on editors and backing their right to refuse adverts. Noting reports of intimidation of journalists in KwaZulu-Natal. Calling for an end to journalists being recruited as spies.

**1998** – Welcoming the office of the Press Ombudsman and encouraging editors to give it regular publicity.

**1999** – Welcoming a Pretoria High Court decision to allow media to publish details of a bail application by Wouter Basson, co-ordinator of the former government's chemical and biological warfare project. Condemning the "arbitrary arrest" of a Swiss journalist for allegedly possessing secret documents on Basson's activities.

**2000** – Objecting to the Heath Investigating Unit's moratorium on communicating with the media. Objecting to a ban on defence force members giving information unless approved by the Defence Minister.

**2001** – Calling on the Safety and Security Minister to withdraw the moratorium on the publication of crime statistics. Noting the death of Donald Woods, ex-*Daily*

*Dispatch* editor, and the legacy he had left to journalists.

**2003** – Calling for the withdrawal of the Anti-Terrorism Bill. Pledging to improve coverage of gender issues. Regretting the Hefer Commission had turned down the application of a journalist not to testify at the inquiry into spy allegations.

**2005** – Objecting to journalists being kept out of a Johannesburg Magistrate's Court for the appearance of Jacob Zuma on a rape charge. Welcoming the National Police Commissioner's response that there had been no police policy or instructions.

**2006** – Noting the inquiry into "allegations of editorial impropriety" in the SABC news division, and asking that hearings be open to the public.

## FREEDOM DAYS

Sanef regularly marks South Africa's Media Freedom Day (October 19) and World Media Freedom Day (May 3). For many years, it has joined *Sowetan*, and later the journalism department of Wits University, in organising topical debates to commemorate October 19. Sanef regions also often hold events to mark this day.



Sanef and Freedom Forum members

# Issues of sensitivity

## LEVELS OF INPUT

Sometimes the boundaries between being “politically correct” and being “sensitive” in journalism are blurred – but in its approach to improving quality Sanef has come out clearly for human rights and transformation issues.

Usually in partnership with other interest groups, Sanef has over the years organised many workshops, the main topics being race, HIV/Aids, media law, gender, xenophobia and human rights. These can be classified as sensitivity rather than skills training.

Then there are intermittent briefings, when a need arises or relevant request comes to Sanef, either about political/legal issues or human rights. The latter included talks by the HRC, monitoring and gender groups, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and HIV/Aids groups.

Sanef members themselves present topical papers – these are usually the educators and trainers, indicating the value they bring to the forum.

Finally, Sanef chooses its own controversial issues for debate, with its members among the panellists. These popular sessions give rise to further debate in the media itself. Most notable among these have been the HIV/Aids privacy debate, national vs public interest (see Ch 17), confidential briefings and tabloids (Ch 19).

## HIV/AIDS AND VIOLENCE

In October 1998, acknowledging the extent of the national crisis of HIV/Aids, Sanef put out a statement supporting the Partnership against Aids campaign.

More effective, however, was a powerful intervention by magazines editor Jane Raphaely at Sanef’s 1999 AGM.

She said there was, in effect, a war against women and children, and that HIV/Aids needed to be seen in this context. A statement was put out and a working group set up, with Raphaely as convenor, which organised further publicity. When Moegsien Williams and Ryland Fisher spoke to the Parliamentary Communications Portfolio Committee in September, they said Sanef had resolved to break the silence around this issue. It would be an ongoing concern in the organisation.

## PRIVACY DEBATE

However, at a time when secrecy and stigma were top in the controversy stakes, some media reported rumours around the cause of death of presidential spokesperson Parks Mankahlana. The man who had once opposed anti-retroviral drugs in pregnancy on the grounds that they would increase the numbers of the Aids orphans, was himself thought by some to have died of Aids.

Sanef hosted a well-attended debate on the ethical issues raised by the media coverage, in November 2000. The panel was John Battersby (*Sunday Independent*), Jim Jones (*Business Day*) and Lizeka Mda (*The Star*), chaired by Gauteng convenor Jovial Rantao.

In Sanef secretary-general Elizabeth Barratt’s notes, distributed afterwards to members, she remarks: “More than half the people there took the microphone and spoke up: with passion, with emotion, wanting to be heard and willing to speak their minds. Journalists in debate: all articulate and informed, caring and ethical, opinionated – but most importantly questioning and critical.

“None of the questions raised were petty; no one was defensive. All seemed to recognise the importance of the debate to understanding our profession, to understanding

each other, to being understood. To understanding how we cover HIV/Aids.”

Questions raised included sources and balance, checking facts, cultural concerns vs journalistic principles, public interest vs privacy, speculation and stigmatising, HIV denial, rights of the family, respect for the dead, racism, selective morality, ignorance, conspiracies and the anger/helplessness of journalists covering HIV/Aids issues.

## HIV WORKSHOPS

How to cover HIV/Aids in the media has long been a difficult issue. There has been the politics around government’s reluctance to deal with the crisis, its focus instead on diet, and the courts forcing the roll-out of anti-retroviral drugs. Then there were secrecy and stigma issues, including violence against those who admitted to having Aids. More recently editors have spoken of the difficulty of making Aids reports newsworthy, the reluctance of editorial staff to cover HIV/Aids stories and perceived Aids “fatigue” of readers.

At its December 2000 council meeting, Sanef decided to co-operate with the Soul City NGO to develop workshops on how to ethically cover HIV/Aids. The first, held also with NGO health-e news, was in Durban in May 2001. They were then run in four other cities. Sanef members advised on the draft of the Soul City handbook for journalists. The launch event in September 2001 in Johannesburg was attended by about 100 people, and the booklet distributed at Sanef events.

Following this, in November 2002, Warren Parker and Richard Delate of the Centre for Aids Development and Research Evaluation (Cadre) briefed council on research into coverage.

## CHILDREN

Within Sanef, there is general agreement that children’s rights should be protected.

In September 2000, Soul City launched a handbook, “Children’s rights and the media”, at a workshop for journalists. Barratt spoke at the lunch, and Sanef distributed the booklet to members.

A “Child rights media code”, produced by the Office of the Rights of the Child in the Presidency, was put to Sanef members for comment in 2001. It evoked questions on whether this was going to be enforced, but members were told it was a document to increase awareness.

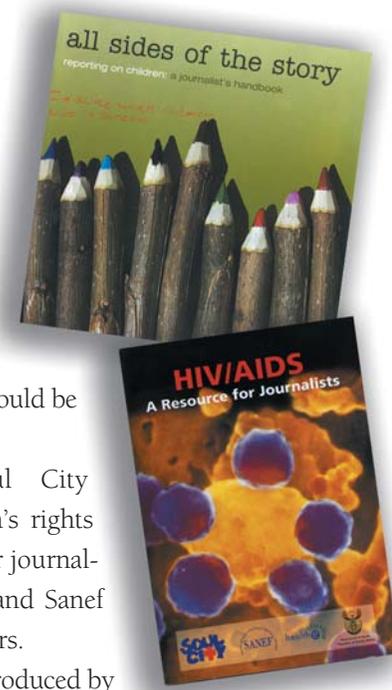
In 2002, William Bird of the Media Monitoring Project (MMP) asked Sanef to endorse an MMP-Unicef initiative to produce a handbook for journalists on reporting child abuse. The forum agreed, asking members to give input and advice on the draft. “All sides of the story” was published in 2003.

## GENDER

Gender issues in the media involve two areas that need increased awareness and change: staffing and content.

In 1999, Sanef sent letters to congratulate the first two black women editors: Lakela Kaunda and Paula Fray. Later that year Kaunda was elected Sanef chairperson.

From 1998 it was agreed gender workshops should be held, but few took this up. At its September 1999 council, attended by Kubeshni Govender of the Gender Commission, the focus was on “stereotyping” in content.



Kaunda noted that although Sanef upheld editors' independence on editorial content, South Africa's "unpleasant history" meant the portrayal of women in the media needed special attention. Members were strongly encouraged to support the "16 days of activism against violence against women" that year, connected also to Sanef's campaign to expose the link between HIV/Aids and domestic violence.

Gender within media proved more intractable. By 2000, as mentioned previously, Sanef had not been able to measure the problem: few media houses were willing to give data on race and gender in media staffing. However, at this stage race became the paramount issue (Ch 10) and the gender focus temporarily waned.

## RACE

After the 2000 HRC inquiry (Ch 10), Sanef committed itself to producing a handbook on reporting race and racism. It did not do so, though some media have set guidelines for reporters.

However, Sanef's education and training subcommittee did run a workshop for 20 senior journalists and trainers. "Promoting transformation in the newsroom: tools and techniques" aimed to give participants methods to tackle transformation and racism in newsrooms.

In November 2000, the Kwazulu-Natal region followed this up with a racism workshop attended by nearly 40 people, followed by a meeting of editors and Jodi Kollapen of the HRC. A similar workshop was held in the Western Cape.

Institute for the Advancement of Journalism-Sanef seminars, "Writing about race", were then held in Cape Town and Johannesburg. Ongoing talks with the HRC led to an ethics seminar, held in October 2001 (Ch 19).



## GENDERSSETTING

Gender issues were taken up again in 2003: the AGM theme was "Engendering the media". William Bird (MMP) spoke on the Gender Media Baseline study, Colleen Lowe Morna (Genderlinks) on the agenda-setting role of the media and Raashied Galant (Gender Advocacy Project) on gender and elections.

Sanef member Lizette Rabe presented a paper on "Gendersetting – the case for gender-sensitive journalism (re)training" in which she summarised some research findings:

- In SADC countries only one in five journalists are women.
- Less than 5% of SADC media managers are women.
- In Southern Africa women constitute less than 20% of news sources.

Working in groups, members identified key strategies for

engendering news sources, media leadership, training and masculinity. Then, in a public statement, Sanef acknowledged women were under-represented in the media and pledged to improve coverage of gender issues.

## GENDER WORKSHOPS

Sanef and Genderlinks held workshops on gender-balanced election reporting in Gauteng, Kwazulu-Natal, Western Cape and Grahamstown. The "Handbook on gender sensitive reporting for media practitioners", to which Sanef members Rabe, Mary Papayya and Judy Sandison contributed, was distributed.

However, on International Women's Day 2004, Sanef distanced itself from Genderlinks' "Strip the back page" campaign, on the principle that the forum's core character entailed respect for the independence of editorial decisions. Still, Sanef stressed its concern on how women are represented – and the controversy itself put gender in the news for several weeks.

By the 2004 AGM, the corrective action subcommittee reported: "What Sanef set out to do at the last AGM was new and sensitive ground for the editors, a difficult challenge in an area in which unstated chauvinism has reigned for decades ... Sanef has pricked the consciences of the media industry on the issue of gender, especially the world of print. It was not always a popular course but Sanef did not falter ... it was something of a breakthrough."

## GLASS CEILING

From the 2003 AGM came the call to do research again – but again members did not provide information on the gender profiles of newsrooms. However a proposal to

study why there are so few women editors was written up and accepted by council. This hit a different snag: Sanef failed to find funding for this research.

Finally, diversity subcommittee members did a smaller study themselves – and presented the results at the 2006 AGM. It looked at the realities senior women face in SA newsrooms, identified obstacles and gave strategies to redress the situation. Questionnaires had been completed by 40 editors, senior journalists and trainers. In summary:

- Questions about why there were so few women editors elicited responses which varied from family commitments and lack of support, to sexism, patriarchy and discriminatory practices.
- Obstacles related to similar broad concepts: a male hegemonic society, stereotypic perceptions and cultural/family factors.
- Respondents knew little of any newsroom gender policies, but said it seemed women managers were becoming more accepted.

At a well-attended (mostly by women) press conference in August 2006, Sanef chair Ferial Haffajee called the findings "shocking". Widespread coverage ensued.

## POVERTY

Addressing the class issue in coverage has not been a focus for Sanef, though the need for the media to cover rural areas of South Africa better was discussed at the Sun City meeting in 2001.

At the May 2004 council, Sanef member Guy Berger presented a paper: "Making an intervention on poverty: what we can do". He argued that it was necessary to be on the continuous lookout for poverty angles, identify causes clearly and give poor people a proper voice.

# Education and training

## ACTIVE GROUP

The education and training subcommittee has been the most consistently active in Sanef, tackling long-term projects and producing some concrete outcomes. They first dealt with the need for closer links between educators and industry, with conferences organised by the Rhodes University journalism department in 1997 and 1998, and looked at journalism for the new South Africa. In 2000, training came to the fore again over issues of race and falling journalism standards.

## SETTING POLICY

Noting that the education and training of journalists was integral to media freedom, human rights and transformation, Sanef's 2000 AGM initiated skills audits of working journalists (See Ch 16) and adopted this policy:

- The purpose of education and training must be the improvement of journalism.
- Ongoing training is the right of every journalist.
- Training is a continuous process that should occur throughout a journalists' career. It should not be seen as only for junior journalists or as being demeaning.
- Media training does not involve just technical or skills training, but should incorporate social/ethical/political components and be holistic.

## EDUCATORS

Taking up the HRC challenge in 2000, the subcommittee looked at transformation in the journalism training sector and sent questionnaires to 13 tertiary institutions. Compositing the nine replies showed:

- Staff: 23% African, 59% white.
- Students: 50% African, 28% white, 15% coloured, 9% Indian.
- Most cover race issues in some courses and all teach black press history.
- Few research media transformation but all have affirmative action policies in staff selection.
- Almost all offer optional African languages; none have "English for journalists" courses.
- High black enrolment is seen in postgraduate and short courses for mid-career journalists.
- Tertiary trainers want closer ties and more support from industry.

In mid-2000, education and training convenor Stephen Wrottesley proposed that industry and educators meet to plan a training roadshow: courses for working journalists to be taken around the country. He followed this up with meetings in the Western Cape and Kwazulu-Natal, but the roadshow concept did not take off.

## NATIONAL BODIES

Sanef kept a close watch as the country set up a national qualifications framework (NQF), the SA Qualifications

*media were to invest resources in the training of political journalists, I am sure this would result in more informed, accurate, reliable and comprehensive coverage of what is happening in the political arena."* – Mbhazima Shilowa, Gauteng Premier, talking to Sanef in 1999

*expressed deep concern at unsatisfactory standards in the media industry and committed itself to working towards improving the quality and ethical practice of journalism ... media freedom in South Africa was placed at risk when journalism was practised by inadequately trained and equipped staffers."* –

Resolution from Sanef AGM 2000

Authority and national standards bodies, sector education and training authorities (Setas) and standards generating bodies (SGBs), and then the Print Media Advisory Committee (which became the Print Media Chamber) and the Film and Electronic Media Advisory Committee.

In the process Sanef influenced how journalism was represented in policy and on a practical level. Members took part in various bodies (print and broadcast separately) on a voluntary basis. In 1999, Guy Berger briefed council about the structure of a media seta. He and then Paddi Clay represented Sanef on the Media, advertising, publishing, printing and packaging (Mapppp) Seta in the ensuing years. Other Sanef members sat on Seta substructures as representatives of their own institutions. But their Sanef "hat" meant they raised issues of unity, transformation, media freedom, diversity and human rights.

A particular benefit to media owners was Sanef in 2002 successfully lobbying so that companies which employed interns from journalism education institutions could reclaim money from the Mapppp Seta.

Sanef has remained involved while the Seta has gone through changes of leadership, restructuring, lack of transparency and communication problems. The forum has at times voiced its frustration with the Seta's bureaucracy, but it has also secured resources from the Seta for research and for publishing handbooks.



Paddi Clay with Peter Sidego and Arrie Rossouw

## WRITING STANDARDS

By 2000, members were leading the work in the journalism standards generating body. Before the end of 2001 the first unit standard was written: editing text. The aim of these standards is to describe the skills and knowledge that journalists need to do their jobs well, and how to assess this capacity.

This slow work continued into 2006, becoming more streamlined as experts were brought in to help. At each stage, Sanef has asked members to comment on drafts of standards – but there has been little feedback. However, most media houses have sent staff for training as assessors.

By mid-2004 a range of standards had been written and the first journalism qualification was complete. The National Certificate: Journalism level 5 (matric plus one year) was approved for registration on the NQF at the end of 2004 and set as the basis for all future journalism qualifications. Clay briefed council and then went on to ensure that standards were written and compiled for a newsroom management qualification.

Part of the success of this subcommittee has been in taking action that, by looking at policy rather than short-term projects, has the potential to greatly improve journalism training. However members have also initiated short courses and workshops over the years.

# Skills audits and indaba

## MEASURING

As a result of its self-questioning in 2000 and its resolution on “unsatisfactory standards”, Sanef decided to do an audit of journalism skills – to measure the extent of problems and find ways to deal with them.

After failing to find funding in South Africa, in 2001 Sanef got a commitment from the Commonwealth Media Development Fund. The education and training sub-committee decided to start by researching a critical area: reporters with two to five years’ experience were identified as being the future leaders of newsrooms.

The research was done by Prof Arrie de Beer (Sanef member) and Elanie Steyn of Scribe Communications, plus Prodigy Business Services.

With the help of Sanef members, researchers got access to most of the newsrooms they targeted. In four cities, questionnaires were filled in, editors and staffers were interviewed, and newsroom processes were observed. Information was also collected on journalism courses offered by universities, technikons and private companies.

## SKILLS AUDIT 1

At its April 2002 council meeting, Sanef members were confronted with the depressing results of the research. There was strident argument about methods and findings, but the general feeling was that the research had confirmed unpalatable truths that members implicitly knew. On May 24, Sanef went public on the study, with a press conference to announce the results.

The full report is on the Sanef website, but in summary the critical areas were:

*journalists need to be able to have pride in what they do and trust in their skills and competencies to do it ... The indaba will seek to put in place methods and strategies that will ensure the existing pride and trust is secured, and then built on.* – Stephen Wrottesley, Skills Indaba convenor, in 2002.

1. Weak interviewing skills
2. Weak legal knowledge
3. Lack of sensitivity
4. Weak knowledge of ethics
5. Poor general, history and contextual knowledge
6. Low level of trainer knowledge
7. Lack of concern with accuracy
8. Poor writing skills
9. Poor reporting skills
10. Lack of life skills
11. Low level of commitment

As most of the 112 reporters surveyed had journalism qualifications, some problems needed to be dealt with at tertiary level: basic practical skills; language, conceptual and life skills; and ethics and law. Sanef members in industry would seek remedial action at individual media houses.

## REGIONAL WORK

However, national action was also required. By its 2002 AGM, Sanef was planning an indaba to see what industry and educators could do to solve the problems.

Stephen Wrottesley, as Skills Indaba convenor, was co-opted on to Sanef’s executive. The indaba was set as Sanef’s top project for 2002.

Regional meetings of industry and education members were held to make practical suggestions. This is one time that Sanef really galvanised action in all regions. Two more meetings were held: the SABC North West and the University of North-West, and the Community Press Forum. All gave written input to the indaba.

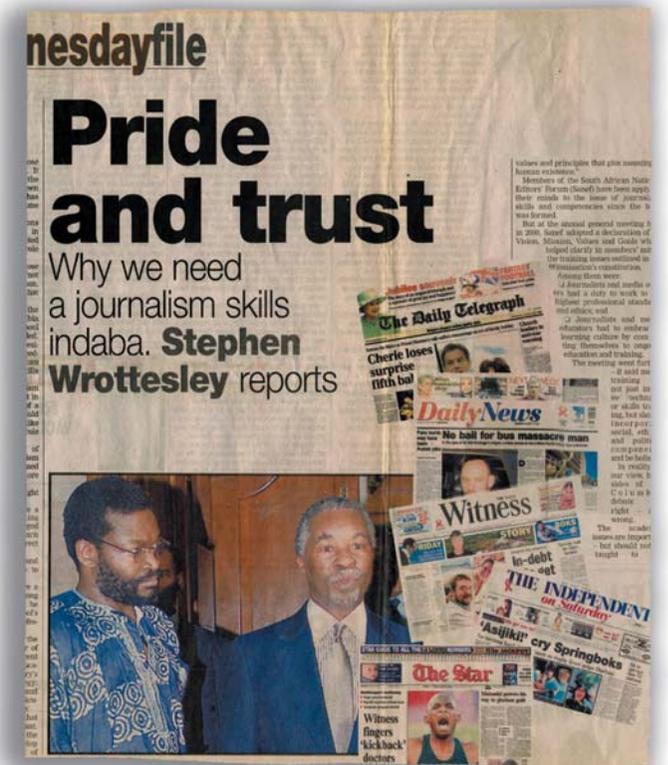
## SKILLS INDABA

Media CEOs and general managers were invited, along with representatives of the Press Ombudsman and community editors. All the top journalism educators from tertiary institutions were invited, as were those from smaller colleges and independent/industry trainers. Then there were all the editors, non-Sanef members included.

Attendance exceeded expectations (and funding) in numbers and seniority: over 100 people were at the indaba, held at Stellenbosch on September 20 and 21 – although there was a lack of top-level broadcast representation.

After opening speeches, industry and educators met separately to decide how to tackle the 11 problems. A combined session looked at the particular training challenges facing electronic media.

On the second day, there was a briefing on journalism unit standards, then a session on industry-trainer partnerships. In a general session, points of agreement and commitment were identified – these were consolidated in a document which became known as “The Stellenbosch commitment”. Finally, media executive Connie Molusi responded on behalf of his peers present, noting that bet-



ter co-ordination and consolidation of training between media houses and with educators was needed. He said the executives were confident “there is no contradiction between the pursuit of the bottom line and the pursuit of excellence”.

## STELLENBOSCH COMMITMENT

As was now usual for Sanef, the Stellenbosch document was put out for consultation, and again later for feedback on progress made.

Among the action plans agreed to, editors, senior journalists and educators would:

- Put trained coaches in newsrooms to work with reporters – education institutions would train coaches.
- Institute punitive measures in newsrooms and training institutions to combat inaccurate reporting.
- Train industry journalism experts as assessors and take part in consultations on journalism unit standards, both measures helping to establish the levels of



Sanef skills audit press conference and indaba 2002

expertise expected of journalists.

- Develop closer relationships between training institutions, holding regional and national meetings and creating a body of those interested in achieving the highest journalism standards.
- Put in place methods to improve the historical, contextual and legal knowledge of journalists and to promote a reading culture.
- Make the codes of conduct of media houses publicly available by publishing them on Sanef's website.

Many, though not all, of these actions took place.

## MEETING THE MINISTER

Industry and educators were both dealing with the legacy of apartheid education, and were aware that much time was being spent trying to develop basic skills that students should have mastered at school.

At the indaba, Sanef said it would meet the Minister of Education to discuss these skills gaps seen in candidates applying for journalism courses at tertiary level. In November 2002, a Sanef delegation accordingly met Kader Asmal in Pretoria, giving him a compilation of suggestions both on basic skills and how to give pupils a better understanding of media and their role in society. However this focus changed when a second, urgent meeting had to be held with the minister about his decision to restrict publishing of matric results.

## SKILLS AUDIT 2

Skills Audit 1 had suggested some problems might be related to management, including the styles of managing both staff members and news, so a second phase of research was proposed. Skills Audit 2 would look at the

skills of newsroom managers.

In early 2003 a brief was put out to prospective researchers, but again there was a funding delay. By May 2004 the Mappp Seta had finally agreed to finance the research, the researchers had been chosen – Scribe and Media Tenor – and work was about to begin.

This research looked at first-line managers with responsibility for both news content and staff, at 50 different media sites. The brief was to assess skills, identify constraints and suggest interventions. Again, questionnaires, interviews and observation were done.

Paddi Clay presented the Skills Audit 2 results to council in May 2005. The final report was sent to members after discussion, and a press release issued.

## NEWSDESK PRESSURES

Skills Audit 2 showed that first-line managers were feeling the squeeze, isolated from above and below.

It recognised that more than just generic management skills were needed to run newsdesks, and that increased commercialisation had added to the importance and pressures of this job.

In addition, two in five of these front-line managers were found to have less than three years' journalistic experience – so had little confidence and knowledge to lead newsrooms and manage reporters. Reporters often had little respect for them, while many editors seemed unaware of their problems.

Research showed that first-line managers:

- Are less positive about their media organisations and working environments than reporters, especially regarding career development, remuneration and infrastructure to do their work. But they are loyal.
- Seem aware they do not communicate as well as

*Unless something is done now, down the line as the experience that is our backbone now evaporates, the young writers tested in this study will be the people in charge. – Mathatha Tsedu, Sanef chair, at Skills Audit 1 press conference in 2002*

they should.

- Are less aware than reporters that planning and administration are not implemented properly.
- Seem highly aware of their shortcomings in taking strategic action.
- Are not as dissatisfied with their ability to implement teamwork.
- Are aware of problems relating to multiculturalism and multilingualism.
- Are highly aware that they are not good at self-management.

Sanef decided on a three-level response:

1. Editors to approach management in their own companies to discuss the audit and find solutions.
2. First-line managers to be encouraged to join Sanef, to improve their global awareness and bridge the communication gaps with editors.
3. Research to be done on what management training is available and a journalism management qualification to be developed.

Besides its own interventions in creating qualifications, Sanef has not been able to measure what positive actions have resulted from its skills audits – as a forum it cannot force members to take action, neither does it have the resources to continually monitor outcomes. However, there can be no doubt that the organisation has led the field in trying to improve the quality of South African journalism.

# National vs public interest

## THE DEBATE

After the Sun City Indaba, Sanef and the government committed themselves to create opportunities for informed dialogue on national issues (see Ch 12). The specific proposal was a conference on “National vs Public interest”.

This was not a new debate to the media – it had been

a source of criticism from outside and within the forum, shown clearly in the Denel conflict (Ch 6) in 1997: how much respect should the media have for the country’s new, legitimate, democratic government?

It is seen in debates on whether media should have the role of watchdog, lapdog, guidedog or guarddog – or a combination of these, reporting both good and bad

news. It also has similarities to early debates on “development journalism”, with its premise that for Third World countries to have time to develop economically, journalists should refrain from critical reporting.

The September 11 2001 attacks on the United States saw the American media showing a high level of patriotism or partisanship, which was not immediately criticised. It was in the shadow of this that Sanef took up the debate.

Sanef, the *Sowetan* and the Wits journalism department hosted a debate on Media Freedom day 2002 – the

25th anniversary of the 1977 attack on media freedom. The title was: “Should the media serve the national or the public interest?” It was chaired by *Sowetan* editor John Dlodlu, who posed the practical question: “Should we be hiding stories in the name of national interest?”

Before the debate, there were quips about the panelists being experts: they had already debated this at the Goedgedacht Forum. Joel Netshitenzhe joked they had become a travelling circus, their own Boswell Wilkie!

Here is a summary of their presentations:

## guide dog or guard dog, watchdog, lapdog, guide dog or guard dog

### GOVERNMENT POSITION:

**Joel Netshitenzhe**  
(CEO of GCIS)



He presented 10 theses:

1. Media as institutions should be given space to work as a platform for freedom of expression – free of political, economic or commercial pressures – but they are impacted on by their environment.
2. Media hold enormous economic, social and political power, so there must be accountability.

3. National interest is the aggregate of things that guarantee the survival and flourishing of a nation-state and nation – and should not be subsumed by public mood swings. It is the 6th sense that evolves with history, often asserted by the authority: the state.

4. Public interest is the aggregate of interests of the community of citizens, the 6th sense of civil society.

5. This dichotomy does not mean there has to be antagonism. In a consistently democratic state, the state exists to serve society and society gives it a mandate to do this. The interests should be complementary. However, individuals or groups sometimes claim to serve one or other

interest, when their motivation is self-interest.

6. There is a hierarchy in defining these concepts, starting with the Constitution – the need to heal the wounds of the past and build democracy. Below this is how you implement these objectives. And below this are details like the need to give prominence to HIV/Aids even if there is no controversy.

7. One presumes the phrase “national interest” is like a red rag to a bull for the media – yet media continually, in editorials and their missions, refer to this. So the issue is more one of who defines the concept.

8. National interest and its expression in SA are evolving

and maturing. But we need consensus on some issues so we can forge ahead as one – and not become unwitting tools of other countries’ national interests or prey to the rumours they start.

9. Pursuing the national interest does not make boring journalism. Positive stories do not make for bad sales – bad journalists do. Good news can be interesting; the problem is SA journalists are unable to do this.

10. Which should the SA media serve? Both! Enjoy their freedoms and exercise the power they have, yet not shout fire in a crowded cinema nor claim that manna can fall from heaven.

## watchdog, lapdog, guide dog or guard dog, watchdog, lapdog, guide dog

### JOURNALISTS’ POSITION:

**Mathatha Tsedu**  
(Sanef chairperson)



According to dictionary definitions, he said, “public” concerns the people as a whole; “nation” is the people of one or more countries, races, etc organised in one state; and “state” is government. Journalists have held the

position that as a nation we have made a contract with ourselves in the form of the Constitution – so if we act against this, we act against ourselves. He therefore agreed with many of Netshitenzhe’s statements.

But as media we need to turn the spotlight on ourselves, and look at who we are talking to.

At the point of an election being held, we see the interaction between government and people, but over the five years of its term, we see interaction only by a few

people with government. When we say we are speaking in the interests of the public, which public are we talking about? The vociferous, well-organised public who can push their own interests and influence what stories we carry in the media, or the silent public who do not understand many of these issues and just hope the Lotto money will deliver?

As we work, the nature of market forces and the need for advertising means we must make sure our mix of

stories draws in the public and the money. How do we accept the challenge of creating a balance that allows us to represent also the voiceless? This is the bigger issue.

South Africa is only one nation when Bafana Bafana or the Bokke win, or when inflation figures go down (which is seldom). As editors we are often chasing the sexy headline that will sell in the leafy suburbs, but there are poor people out there whose interests we are supposed to serve too.

# Editors and Africans

## LOOKING OUTWARD

Sanef members have always kept in mind journalism around the rest of the continent. Initially, they issued statements of solidarity (see Ch 13), but in time they became more ambitious.

Sanef stayed in step with the continental changes that came with the formation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) in 2001 and the African Union (AU) in July 2002, seeing these as opportunities to expand media freedom.

It was in 1999 that Sanef started to discuss a conference of African editors, but the idea did not get off the ground. At same time, Judy Sandison reported to council on a meeting with Tanzania's High Commissioner, Ami Mpungwe, who on behalf of the African diplomatic corps said he was concerned that South African media portrayed the rest of Africa as a hopeless continent. He challenged the media to portray the continent differently.

## STARTING SMALL

Sanef started talking about arranging its own conference – and by late 2001 had decided to begin with editors in its own region as there had been attacks on media free-

### 1991 DECLARATION:

**Consistent with article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the establishment, maintenance and fostering of an independent, pluralistic and free press is essential to the development and maintenance of democracy in a nation, and for economic development.**

– Declaration of Windhoek (on promoting independent and pluralistic media in Africa), May 3 1991

dom in many of the countries. The idea was to hold a meeting to initiate a regional editors' forum. However, events in Zimbabwe intervened: the March 2002 presidential election challenged the media freedom of South Africans as it seemed many journalists would be barred from covering the poll.

## NEGOTIATING ZIMBABWE

Sanef chairperson Mathatha Tsedu played a vital role in successfully lobbying for the accreditation of South African journalists for the election, as a result of which most organisations were able to report from that country.

After a meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad, Sanef also facilitated the inclusion of knowledgeable non-practising journalists in the SA Observer Mission. The reports from Collin Nxumalo, Rashid Seria and Harry Mashabela – who differed in their opinions – were circulated to members, as was a paper from Guy Berger titled: "What are the media preconditions for an election

to qualify as being 'free and fair?'".

With the up-coming July 2002 formation of the AU, Sanef hoped to lobby for progressive media freedom protocols to be adopted by the new body. The Speaker of the South African parliament invited Sanef to a briefing on the AU in March – Elizabeth Barratt attended and circulated a lengthy report afterwards.

## SOUTHERN GUESTS

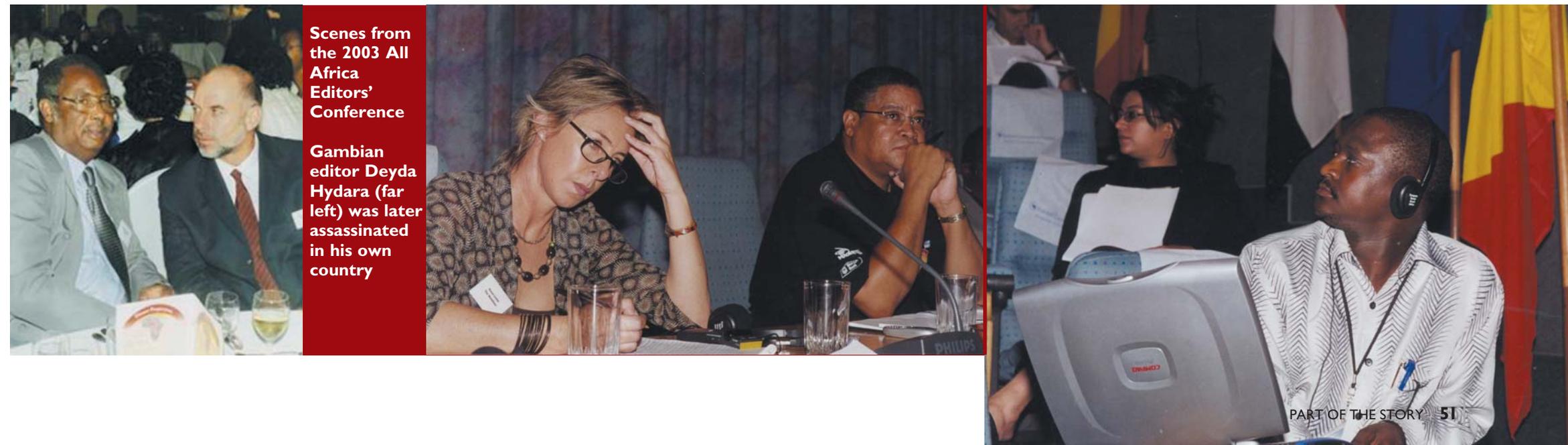
Links with editors in the south were actively developed. At its 2002 AGM in June, with the theme "The African Union", Sanef had guests from Zambia, Swaziland, Lesotho, Namibia and Tanzania, and from the media freedom organisations Misa and Article 19. Eddy Maloka of the Africa Institute spoke at dinner. Southern Africa editors' concerns were discussed, as was the need to create national editors' forums and give input to AU documents on media freedom. It was decided to hold an African conference of editors, not just a regional one.

*problems on the continent*  
**We have our problems on the continent regarding press freedom but overall since the signing of the Windhoek Declaration things have improved ... (yet) we still have a long way to go.** – Mathatha Tsedu, Sanef chair, on World Press Freedom Day 2002  
*Windhoek Declaration things have improved*

By November, the planned All Africa Editors' Conference (AAEC) had already been delayed once – it turned into an enormous task as Sanef had to contact editors all over the continent and organise travel. Latiefa Mobara, no longer Sanef's executive director, was appointed as organiser, and Media Freedom convenor Henry Jeffreys took leave to work on this project. The conference would be co-hosted with the Institute for Global Dialogue and the Southern African Media Training Trust (NSJ).

## EDITORS MEET

Dates were set: April 11 to 13 2003 in Johannesburg. The theme was: "The media, the African Union, Nepad and democracy". About 60 editors from outside of South Africa, representing 30 countries, and 60 South Africans



**Scenes from the 2003 All Africa Editors' Conference**

**Gambian editor Deyda Hydara (far left) was later assassinated in his own country**

attended. Among them was Gambian editor Deyda Hydara, who would later be assassinated at home.

President Mbeki delivered the keynote speech, in which he challenged editors to report Africa to the Africans from a basis of knowing Africa well. He said he presumed that “you were African before you became journalists and that despite your profession, you are still Africans”. (Sanef followed this up with a debate at its 2003 AGM: “Journalists first or Africans first?”)

Out of this conference came a decision to form a continental body as well as five regional bodies for editors. The regional bodies would be made up of representatives from national bodies. A steering committee was chosen to organise this.

## SAEF AND WAEF LAUNCH

Some of the 10 countries of Southern Africa already had editors’ bodies, and by November 2003 all except Angola were organised. They sent representatives to Johannesburg to form the Southern Africa Editors’ Forum (SaeF), at a follow-up conference organised by Sanef. By 2006, they shared an office with Sanef but operated separately. There are problems with the Zimbabwe forum because of splits between state and independent editors – but talks continue.

In West Africa, there was difficulty in creating national forums, so it was decided to first

*I do not believe there is anyone that who would claim that press freedom permits that we should have the liberty to present a false and uninformed picture of our continent.* – President Thabo Mbeki to the All Africa Editors’ Conference, April 2003

form the regional body and from there to promote national ones. The West Africa Editors’ Forum was launched in October 2005. East and Central have had similar problems and have not formally launched yet, but are represented on the steering committee. There has as yet been no success in contacting editors from the North.

## FOUNDING OF TAEF

In October 2005, the steering committee organised a second conference, again in Johannesburg (although the hope had been to be in the Democratic Republic of Congo, but it is less difficult to get funding for such events in South Africa).

This was the founding conference of The African Editors’ Forum (TaeF) and was titled “Reporting Africa for Africans and the world”. A draft constitution was established. President Mbeki spoke again and United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan sent a message. Tsedu and Barratt were elected as chairperson and general secretary respectively.

The steering committee has been meeting about twice a year since 2003, all working on a voluntary basis. Meetings continue to be conducted in French and English.

In September 2006 the Editors’ Council of TaeF, made up of representatives from each of the regional bodies, met for the first time in Grahamstown, South Africa,



hosted by Highway Africa. One of the items under discussion was African input at the World Editors’ Forum meeting in Cape Town in June 2007.

## PEER REVIEW

In February 2004, the Sanef council noted that the forum should lobby for media to be recognised as part of good governance in the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Sanef also circulated member Raymond Louw’s document on “insult laws”, which in many African countries restrict media from criticising their leaders and governments.

Sanef’s 2005 AGM put out a statement asking the South African government to use its influence to induce the AU to “improve the African Peer Review Mechanism criteria to include the need for a free and independent media” as an essential element of democracy. During 2006 Sanef was represented – mostly by Louw – at the South African review meetings, and delivered a presentation to the APRM council.

African editors’ meetings in 2005 and 2006



# Media ethics

## NO CHARTER

Sanef members agree on self-regulation to deal with complaints. Reports from the Press Ombudsman and Broadcasting Complaints Commission are tabled at council. At the same time, the forum encourages all media to have their own ombudsmen and codes of ethics, and to make these public.

It reached this understanding among members early on, by having an ethics workshop in November 1997 and appointing a Media Charter task group. The task group recommended: “An editors’ charter seeking to dictate to editors what should constitute content would be inimical to the concept of freedom of expression.”

It is on this basis that Sanef has not set up its own ethics code and also takes no public stand about the content of media – though content is sometimes fiercely debated at meetings.

## ETHICS SEMINAR 2001

Ethics remain controversial. After the HRC commission (see Ch 10), there were questions about whether media codes should have provisions dealing with race and whether they lacked African approaches.

After further talks with the HRC, Sanef convened a two-day seminar in October 2001: “Freedom of expression and media ethics – a South African approach”. It was hosted with the HRC and the SA Chapter of the African Renaissance, and organised by Ryland Fisher. About 100 people attended: media, civil society and political parties.

Mandla Seleokane presented research on media freedom and Ferial Haffajee on media ethics. Barney Pityana of the HRC and Kwame Karikari of the University of

Ghana spoke, and Seleokane made a speech on an African approach to ethics.

## THE ISSUES

Despite several key Sanef members not turning up, the seminar proceeded to discuss:

- The rights given to the media by the constitution, and their balance with competing rights.
- How existing codes of conduct could be improved.
- Whether self-regulating bodies could be more reactive (they are complaints-driven).
- Ethical decision-making in newsrooms.

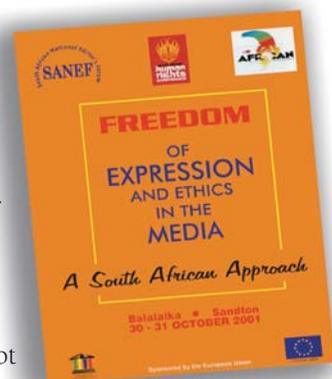
Sanef later endorsed an ethics book, published in 2004 by one of its members, Franz Krüger. The author consulted Sanef members in his writing and he later led council discussions on “Black, white and grey: Ethics in South African journalism”.

## MEDIA MANNERS

In 2002 and 2003, the embarrassing non-attendance of journalists and editors at events after confirming they would be there, was deemed by Sanef as harming the credibility of all journalists. Sanef was also experiencing the problem internally – the final straw being at its own 2004 Nat Nakasa ceremony. Finally a letter was sent to all members to try to curb this tendency.

## BAD TIMES

The period 2003-4 was a difficult one for the media: ranging from high-profile incidents of plagiarism, through to the controversial naming of Judge Siraj Desai



as a rape-accused in India (he was later acquitted). Controversy also erupted over a racially selective and confidential briefing of editors by Bulelani Ngcuka, Director-General of Public Prosecutions.

The nadir, however, was *City Press*'s abusive “spy allegations” against Ngcuka. This story, written by Ranjeni Munusamy, originated with supporters of then Deputy President Jacob Zuma seeking to discredit a probe into him by Ngcuka. The story unfolded through dramatic revelations at the Hefer Commission, where evidence by *City Press* editor Vusi Mona brought broad disgrace on the profession. In the middle of this, Sanef was faced with a new subpoena controversy as several journalists besides Mona were called to testify.

Sanef's objection was that, in the public interest of a

free flow of information, journalists needed to protect their confidential sources. This approach did not convince Hefer when it came to Munusamy: he still ordered her to testify. Sanef – with the FXI and Misa – then supported her decision to take his ruling on judicial review. Although Sanef leaders had grave reservations about her journalistic conduct, they saw themselves as defending two principles:

- The desirability of exempting journalists from being forced to testify.
- Where testimony does occur, the importance of sources being kept confidential.

Some members, however, saw this as supporting Munusamy personally. Sanef's executive responded: “We believe these principles and positions are not merely in the interests of the integrity of journalism, but primarily in the public interest. This is because they protect the public's right to a free flow of information which is essential to democracy.” Eventually, Hefer closed his inquiry and the Munusamy matter fell away.

The 2004 AGM saw Sanef's executive declare: “It can be safely said that trust in the media and journalism among the broader public (our core constituency) and other key stakeholders is not what it should



be. This is a matter which we should address as public trust is the only currency we deal in.” The Western Cape region ran a workshop on ethics in May 2004, organised by Lizette Rabe, to help repair the media’s reputation.

## CONFIDENTIAL BRIEFINGS

At its November 2003 council meeting, Sanef held a lively debate on confidential briefings: members Mondli Makhanya and Justice Malala took positions for and against the desirability of journalists agreeing to such briefings. Guy Berger then compiled guidelines about confidential briefings which were discussed in February 2004, amended and then adopted by council in May.

The guidelines include general principles of openness, transparency, nonracialism and the public interest, a checklist of questions to consider when dealing with confidential sourcing and possible options to help with decision-making.

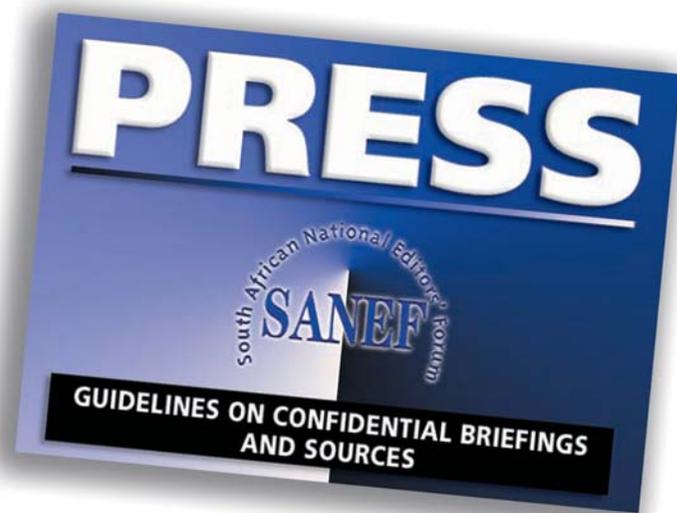
These were printed as a credit-card sized pamphlet and given to journalists and journalism students around the country.

## ACCURACY

Sanef’s November 1999 meeting discussed a letter from Press Ombudsman Ed Linington concerning public complaints about inaccuracies, the “cutting of corners” based on half-truths and the use of half-baked stories from people with grudges.

In late 2000, the Ombudsman again said many complaints concerned “a lack of respect for simple journalistic virtues”. By 2004 he reported that most complaints related to inaccurate reporting.

In March 2005 the council had a discussion on



“Accuracy – or the lack of it” with a paper presented by Rabe. Ideas for solutions included checklists for reporters, fact-checking, regular apology columns and name-and-shame tactics in newsrooms. Most editors felt it would not be appropriate to reward what should be a basic journalistic skill. Members’ experiences of “best practices” were later circulated.

For its April 2006 meeting, Sanef staged a panel discussion on coverage of the Jacob Zuma rape trial, because of accusations of skewed stories.

## POLICY ON FUNDING

Sanef’s operational costs are funded by media houses and membership fees. However, it needs further funding for events and projects. The forum has benefited from many businesses and organisations that have funded events and council meetings (venues and meals). In exchange, these groups often give a short briefing to editors; put up banners and distribute small gifts as well. Members have raised issues around sponsored events, noting “there is no such thing as a free lunch”.

Then there has been criticism: when looking for international funding for Skills Audit 1, funders tended to ask: “But why aren’t your media businesses doing this themselves?”

In May 2005 Sanef held a sponsorship debate. Franz

Krüger presented a paper, saying Sanef was making itself vulnerable to criticism. Council then asked Gavin Stewart to draft guidelines for sponsorship, which were adopted in 2006.

## SEEKING A SUMMIT

Can Sanef sometimes act as a union, fighting for its individual members as workers? The forum has taken the position that it does not deal with individual, workplace-based cases.

However, some members had strong feelings when *Sunday Times* editor Mathatha Tsedu was fired in November 2003. Sanef’s executive decided to discuss this with the Johnnic CEO, but restricted its talks to issues of wider relations.

As a result, in February 2004 council felt the management committee should meet industry bosses to iron out concerns of editors. Mutual expectations between editors and employers needed clarifying, and there was concern that independent ethical editorial decision-making was being hampered by commercial pressure. The question was also whether editorial quality had suffered because of a focus on the bottom line.

After further discussion, in May 2005 council agreed to seek a summit of editors and managers and owners to identify problems and chart a way forward. Council then asked Berger to draft a position paper. After consultation and amendments, it was discussed in detail at the 2005 AGM and then sent to media industry bodies.

The National Association of Broadcasters said members would welcome the meeting, but Print Media Association members felt issues of editorial independence should be dealt with in-house. By mid-2006 there was no resolution.

## TABLOID DEBATE

With the rise of tabloid journalism, some criticisms were aired at Sanef meetings. Some long-term Sanef members, now tabloid editors, felt they were being attacked and that this went against Sanef’s position on editorial independence. In addition, when well-known Sanef members criticised tabloids in the media, there was a danger this could be read as a Sanef position.

At the 2005 AGM, a heated panel debate was held. Sanef afterwards put out a statement welcoming the tabloids as a “vibrant element of the changing landscape” but confirming the forum’s commitment to journalistic integrity, tolerance and accountability.

A similar issue arose in 2006, when some members criticised what was seen as an anti-gay article in a broadsheet newspaper. It came up again in regard to a Sanef letter to the SABC about the spiking of a documentary on the country’s president.

In both cases, again Sanef reaffirmed its position that taking a critical stance on editors’ content decisions was not in its mandate, as it upheld the principles of editorial independence.

## MOTORING EDITORS

In August 2005, “concerned motoring editors” asked Sanef to discuss the increasing trend towards bought editorial space which motoring journalists felt undermined their credibility. A representative gave a short presentation to council, detailing pressure on writers to give positive reports. Sanef followed this up by writing to the SA Guild of Motoring Journalists – who replied that they were equally concerned and would soon be adopting a code of good practice.

# Promoting democracy

## HIGH IDEALS

Most senior journalists will identify with media freedom issues, as was seen from the start of Sanef. They will agonise over problems of lack of quality or accuracy, or unfairness to marginalised groups in society. They will want to balance commercial interests and duties of service to their communities. But it takes high commitment for them to really take on the big job that Sanef in 1996 listed as the first item in its Declaration of Intent:

- To nurture and deepen media freedom as a democratic value in all our communities and at all levels of our society.

Taking on such a role in South Africa means not just confronting and fighting individual issues, but keeping an eye on the bigger picture and finding the best ways to build and nurture a culture of respecting free speech in a fledgling democracy – for the benefit of journalism but also for the country as a whole.

This has been a difficult ideal for Sanef to live up to.

## AT THE START

Sanef's founders had their eye on this ball: in February 1997, the first Sanef council meeting decided to liaise with the Print Media Association and the National Association of Broadcasters to co-ordinate a roadshow to promote media freedom issues. In June that year, minutes note their resolve: “The plan is to have a roadshow format interactive with the public via exhibitions, debates, panel discussions, phone-ins, workshops, town hall meetings, etc and to focus it first in Durban and Cape Town, ending at the Sowetan in Johannesburg in October.”

By October, the need for such a campaign was clear. Judy Sandison was mandated to call a meeting of jour-

nalists and editors in Kwazulu-Natal to discuss intimidation. Her report to Sanef noted that editors in that province “are very concerned about some recent incidents/statements by politicians at rallies etc where journalists' names were mentioned by the speaker and then the reporter had to flee”. She gave examples: an SABC reporter had his car stoned by a crowd wearing IFP T-shirts, and another had to flee a rally where an ANC MEC criticised regional television coverage. She said there was strong pressure from both parties to get journalists to cover certain stories, as well as rumours spread about reporters which endangered their lives. And these events were all very early in the run-up to the local elections, due only in 1999.

It proved impossible, however, to mount a roadshow. But Sanef continued to discuss the idea, noting in 1998 that there was “intolerance at all levels of society” to critical reporting.

## INFLUENCE ON ELECTIONS

In this run-up to the 1999 local elections, Sanef issued statements or met with party leaders or government officials when journalists were attacked or threatened. This usually concerned the ANC or IFP in Kwazulu-Natal, but also involved intolerance by premiers in other provinces, for example.

Sanef was also proactive. It discussed the Electoral Bill and gave input for a code of electoral conduct for politicians in Kwazulu-Natal. Members pointed out that the code needed to include penalties for intimidating journalists. Emails show Sanef members were advising and supporting each other on these issues.

Professor Mandla Mchunu, CEO of the Independent Electoral Council (IEC), briefed editors on election

*what are we going to do about the very high expectations that ordinary South Africans have of us as leaders of the media? The bad news for editors ... is that those expectations are not going to go away.* – Henry Jeffreys, May 2004

arrangements. Sanef was involved in the signing of the code for politicians, and it was noted afterwards that relationships had been better than for the 1994 elections. Some problems recur at election times, and Sanef has continued to play a role – with Judy Sandison and Mary Papayya in particular keeping an eye on Kwazulu-Natal.

Sanef members were invited to a Peace Pledge Signing ceremony for political parties in February 2004 in Durban, at which the media also pledged to give free and fair election coverage. In Gauteng, the IEC's Pansy Tlakula briefed editors on pre-election preparations and Sanef advised the IEC on what kind of information media would need on election day as well as easier access to polling stations. She and her staff gave a similar briefing to council in Bloemfontein early in 2006.

## DEMOCRACY SEMINARS

Then, as South Africa headed to the 10th anniversary of its democracy, Sanef moved to looking more directly at issues of democracy. To mark this milestone – and highlight the role of the media – it decided to hold seminars on “South African Media in the First Decade of Democracy” in each of the five regions during 2004:

- February in Cape Town: Kader Asmal spoke on “Bad news, good news and the politics of hope”; Adam Habib on “Creating substantive uncertainty”; Ferial Haffajee on “An end of probation”; and Jakes Gerwel on “Media in a new conversational community”.

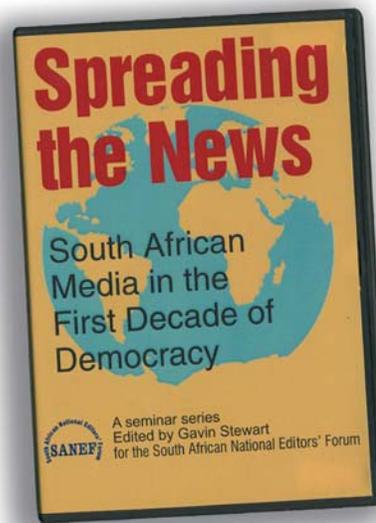
- May in Durban: Asha Moodley spoke on “Where are the women?”; Kessie Naidu on “Media and the law”; and Cyril Madlala on “The past 10 years and the challenges ahead”.
- August in Johannesburg: Pius Langa on “Journalism, ethics and the law”; Joel Netshitenzhe and Mathatha Tsedu on “Ethics and Politics”; Trevor Ncube, Marcel Golding and Mzimkulu Malunga on “The Bottom Line”; and Allister Sparks and Jon Qwelane on “Ethics and journalism: the road behind and the road ahead”.
- September in Grahamstown: Angelo Fick and Dumisani Hlope debated “Representing race in the past decade: all change or the same old?”; Anthea Gorman and Thabo Leshilo debated “Dumbing down: a decade of media denigrating intellectuals”; and Paddy Clay and Gavin Stewart debated “The industry should prioritise workplace-based cadet programmes rather than relations with tertiary institutions”.
- December in Bloemfontein: Clem Sunter spoke on “South Africa 2014 and tools for scenario planning”; Justice Malala on “Whither South African Journalism?”; Kanthan Pillay on “Journalism and Technology: the next 10 years”; Guy Berger on “The training of



**Kader Asmal with Sanef administrator Femida Mehtar at the seminar in February 2004**

journalists: the next 10 years”; and Connie Molusi on “The media industry in 2014”.

At the end of the series it was published on CD, titled: “Spreading the News: South African Media in the First Decade of Democracy (1994-2004)”, edited by Sanef member Gavin Stewart.



was one activity that did not materialise).

On Media Freedom Day in October 2005 it was announced: “Sanef has embarked on this campaign because editors have noted that the media regularly come under attack from key stakeholders in society who

see the institution as an easy whipping boy. Yet the media are a force for good in society and an essential element of democracy.”

At every council meeting, the campaign was discussed – but there was little evidence of it being picked up. Editors, it seemed, could more easily be reactive to media freedom threats than proactive in regard to pre-empting the same.

## MEDIA IN SOCIETY

In October 2005 the SABC, Sanef and University of Limpopo hosted a public seminar in Johannesburg entitled “Transformation of the media in a society in transition”, to look at how the media had performed since 1994, and its role in national debate and identity.

## ROADSHOW RETURNS

Practical issues had earlier overtaken the idea of a roadshow to promote media freedom as a democratic necessity. But in 2005 talk turned again to democracy and the criticisms that the media were encountering. Editors said they had a sense that the public did not support the media; journalism did not have their trust and respect; and they did not seem to understand why journalists should be able to report freely.

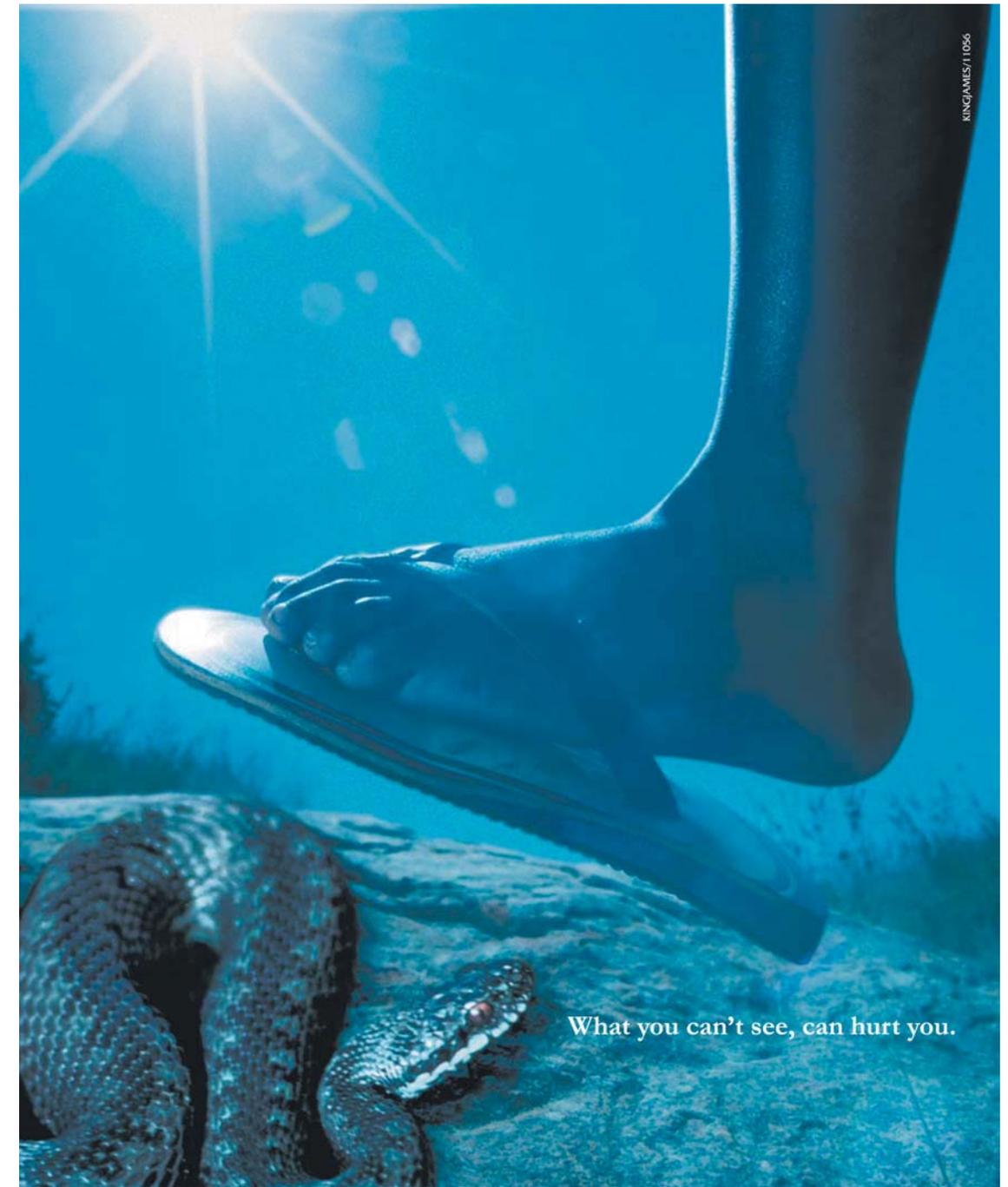
At the 2005 AGM members decided to launch a national campaign to promote the credibility of the media in order to entrench long-term media freedom. The slogan “Why media freedom matters” was adopted as the theme for the year. It was decided to take this campaign to the public through the mass media and hold meetings with various sectors of society. This time, editors would also invite the public into their newsrooms (although this

## ADVERT CAMPAIGN

However, the media freedom subcommittee proceeded to work on an advertising campaign. Ferial Haffajee did the first draft for a public service announcement, based on the concept of “imagine life without media freedom”. The adverts were hotly debated at council meetings. They were finally launched on 2006 World Press Freedom Day (May 3), with the slogan changed to “Media freedom is your freedom”.

The theme of the adverts was “What you can’t see can hurt you”, emphasising: “The media are your eyes and ears on the world. Insist on media freedom because it’s your freedom.”

Print and radio versions were carried by some media, and a television spot ran just before the news that day on SABC television. A criticism was that the campaign, novel as it was, did not extend to African languages.



The media are your eyes and ears on the world. Media freedom guarantees your right to know what’s going on in your country, and participate fully in the decisions affecting you. Media freedom is **your** freedom. Insist on it. To find out more, go to [www.sanef.org.za](http://www.sanef.org.za)



# How Sanef works

## MEETINGS AND OFFICE

Sanef's management committees usually have weekly or bi-weekly telecon meetings, often bringing in other members to discuss current issues. The elected council meets four times a year in different regions, and the AGM is held mid-year. Non-council members are encouraged to attend council meetings.

Since 2005, Sanef's office in Rosebank, Johannesburg, has had a full-time executive director and an assistant, Joan Roberts and Precious Enele. Before this, the forum often had to notch up its achievements with only a part-time executive director or office manager to organise things.

Management committees have had various approaches to communication. At one stage, all members received weekly minutes by email as well as notes on debates and other events. More recently, council receives management committee minutes while members get the council and AGM minutes.

At the start, news agencies Sapa and Eena offered to distribute media releases from Sanef. However, these were soon distributed directly by email to newsrooms to improve coverage.

## CHANGING STRUCTURES

At the start, Sanef set up subcommittees on areas of concern and most were active despite having to organise meetings with members spread around the country. Each subcommittee had a convenor on council. Sanef members do this work on a voluntary basis. In 2000, to involve more members, it added regional structures, with convenors of the five regions also on council.

However, over time subcommittees became unwieldy. If there were no pressing concerns, it was difficult to get busy members to meet, and convenors were overloaded with projects decided on by AGM or council. So in 2006 Sanef amended its constitution to put in place "project champions" to work on individual projects or areas of on-going concern.

## MEMBERSHIP AND FUNDING

Potential members must be nominated by two members, and pay an annual fee (R350 in 2006). Sanef's constitution says:

- "Membership shall be open to any person in South Africa who is a senior editorial executive in the print

and electronic media, including newspapers, magazines, regional publications, radio and television, on-line news media, community media and to people of similar status in media education. A 'senior editorial executive' shall be defined as a journalist with executive or managerial responsibilities. Besides Editors, nominations can be drawn from Deputy Editors, Assistant Editors, Sports Editors, News Editors and other executives at this level."

Definitions of this clause have often been debated, so guidelines have been drawn up.

From 1999 a special effort was made to get "new media" journalists to join. In 2001 the dearth of magazine editors in Sanef was noted, but there has been less success in getting them involved.

Sanef's operational expenses are funded by the media industry and membership fees, while individual projects or events are funded by various organisations. Editors have often arranged for their media to carry Sanef adverts free of charge, eg. 2001 ethics seminar notice and Skills Audit tender, and 2006 media freedom campaign.

Sanef members are by definition not media owners. Media owners get report-backs when Sanef's executive does fundraising visits. Sanef has long had working rela-

tionships with the Print Media Association and National Association of Broadcasters, and more recently with the Association of Independent Publishers.

## SANEF.ORG.ZA

Sanef discussed website proposals for a number of years, but could not find funding to set up a complex site where members could interact. At the end of 2001 it decided to set up a simple website to be funded from operational monies. A policy was drafted on what should go on it.



## WROTTESELEY AWARD

After active Sanef member Stephen Wrottesley died suddenly in 2003, it was suggested a scholarship be set up in his name for people to do practical work to improve journalism training. After failing to find funding, in 2006

this was changed to an internal Sanef award, given intermittently to members who have shown long-term, practical commitment. The first award was given to Joe Thloloe in August 2006.



# Problems ... and promise

## HIGH AIMS

This short history shows the amount and range of work Sanef has done in a decade. The forum is not without faults and weaknesses, and is subject to peaks of participation and troughs of subsidence. It struggles to keep to the tasks its members have chosen – they often aim for too much. However, overall it has punched above its weight politically and gained great credibility, despite being a voluntary organisation with few resources.

Taking the approach that diversity of opinions is its strength, Sanef has also found methods to represent the range of members' opinions, and promote an acceptance of differences being voiced in meetings. It is a forum for debate ... but also one that has built consensus when need be.

## COMPARISONS

Editors by nature are difficult to organise: they are often individualistic, and always very busy. Sanef has succeeded despite this, and despite differences to counterparts elsewhere in the world.

In other new democracies or developing states, such organisations usually deal with practical problems of lack of equipment and money. And many have to fight overt intolerance and the use of coercive, legal, economic and co-optive measures by the state or businesses. In developed countries, on the other hand, editors' organisations usually focus on career and business development, researching trends and highlighting innovations.

Editors in South Africa sit between these two. They face the issues of a new democracy, though without the daily worries of survival, and they take on some professional and business pressures of developed states. In addition, they must tackle their unique context: the legacy of apartheid with its damaging inequities, and the challenge of defining appropriate journalism against this background.

## AVOIDANCE & ADAPTATION

From 1996, the need for unity was often so paramount that the forum avoided explosive issues. This nearly backfired at the time of the HRC hearings, but with strong leadership Sanef survived. Yet race and gender imbalances remain divisive and still demand attention.

On the longer term, what will keep Sanef together? How long will the unifying context – South Africa's history and its new democracy – continue to keep members working as hard as they have been?

The seeds of change might already be seen in the slow fall-off of active involvement by certain top editors in Sanef activities. Although others have come forward, it has become mostly the senior journalists, and the educators, who find time in their equally busy lives to put in the work required.

Related to this is the lack of "new blood" coming into Sanef. Over the decade, the same names pop up continually. Will a new generation identify with Sanef's aims and ideals, and join in?



## FEW ALLIES

Another problem that has developed over the decade: the loss of allies. Journalism unions Mwasa, SAUJ and the FBJ used to give those journalists junior to Sanef members a voice. Today, two of them are defunct. Media freedom organisations Article 19 and the Freedom Forum have closed their offices, leaving just Misa and FXI.

On the other hand, there is the rise of the Association of Independent Publishers of Southern Africa and Online Publishers Association, and rejuvenation of the Forum of Community Journalists – bodies Sanef can work with.

In 2005, Clive Menell Journalism Fellows asked Sanef to do something about the lack of organisations for journalists. The forum decided, however, to keep its membership limited to the most senior practitioners. Yet it needs to avoid becoming a lone voice: how can it help other journalist bodies flourish?

## OTHER WEAKNESSES

- Sanef has not yet found a way to sustain lobbying on the many remaining laws that conflict with the Constitution. Meanwhile, other young democracies show there is a limited "window of opportunity" for building on the idealism of a new democracy.
- There are still race issues to tackle, and Sanef has to make progress on gender discrepancies.
- The forum was early on challenged about the lack of diversity in media ownership, but not much has even been done to support community media.
- Sanef in 2006 is more financially secure than in some previous years, but fund-raising still remains a continual task.

*Free speech must always be "a very good thing" whether or not it causes trouble. I*

*do not believe the media can do its job properly without causing trouble. Not infrequently, though, the trouble it causes*

*lands it in hot water.* – Pius Langa, Chief Justice, speaking to Sanef on August 17, 2006

*properly without causing*

## PART OF THE STORY

What does Sanef signify after ten years of not just surviving, but of having scores of statements, projects and interventions to its name?

It has undoubtedly carved out, and kept, a space in the public domain where media leaders can have a collective impact and be taken seriously in many quarters, including some other African countries. Forces seeking to interfere in media know they will have to contend with an organised formation that will react. Others wanting to consult or promote social causes know there is a body with credible intent and record with whom they can deal.

Sanef has found – against many odds – common ground among strong-willed media practitioners, notwithstanding divides over race, gender, tactics and genres of journalism. It has inspired editors around the continent, and has built bridges at home between media platforms, and between practitioners and trainers.

While the forum sometimes fades in terms of fulfilling plans, it succeeds in pulling off many more.

Perhaps its greatest success is in providing something that is at once both a home and a springboard whereby senior media people cannot just report the story of South Africa in transition, but also help shape it.

As such, Sanef's achievement is to defend and advance purposes that benefit society as a whole: quality journalism, media freedom and social transformation.

# Sanef's future: the next 10 years

**Q The challenge for a Sanef chairperson is to hold together a forum with a wide range of views. What's the secret to achieving this?**

A Editing a newspaper like the Mail&Guardian is similar. We are a disparate group with very different views. We decide on editorials, endorsements and policies by wide-ranging discussions through which we strive for maximum consensus. I am new to Sanef but similar principles should apply. There is also that wonderful document called the Constitution (of SA) that can guide us. An organisation like Sanef cannot possibly take regressive positions on equity, media freedom and the like.

**Q From inception, Sanef leaders committed the forum to dealing with previous injustices regarding both race and gender – in staffing and in content. So far, race has been the priority. What should Sanef be doing now?**

A I'm not convinced that the work of racial equity is done. It appears that only one Independent Newspapers title is edited by a black African; no Media24 titles (other than City Press and Sunday Sun) seem so graced. Johncom does better. What about the level beneath? Racial diversity or equity has slowed down.

The Glass Ceiling study shows that there are too few women editors and that there is a lot of work to do. My time as chairperson of Sanef will be devoted to ensuring the next study reveals a very different picture.

**Q The diversity subcommittee never got off the ground, though Sanef did contribute to debates on the IMDT and MDDA. Is diversity in media ownership an issue for the forum?**



**INTERVIEW  
with 2006/7  
Sanef  
chairperson:  
Ferial  
Haffajee**

*(Mail&Guardian  
editor)*

**Q Some CoE members in 1996 were unhappy to be in a body with people who weren't exclusively editors-in-chief in status. Now, most senior members are not very actively involved. Your analysis?**

A My early discussions with title editors (and their broadcast counterparts) suggest they think that Sanef is too cumbersome in its functioning: meetings are too long; decision-making too complex.

In addition, they complain that it's been taken over by "the trainers", though I think there are enough title editors actively involved not to get too existential about whether Sanef is actually an editors' forum. In addition, we should emulate some of the work of the World Editors Forum which is basically an editors' master-class: it includes sessions on the process and business of editing in the 21st century.

**Q Looking ahead at the next 10 years, how should Sanef foster an appreciation of media freedom among all South Africans?**

A We should really figure out a way to make the "Media freedom is your freedom" campaign work.

A Sanef is not an advocacy body, nor is it an activist one. It is an editors' forum that must be guided by the needs and imperatives of its constitution and of its members. Those members are (largely) employed by the big companies. Are they going to support campaigns for greater diversity of ownership? Sanef can only be as activist and as vociferous as its members want it to be.

**Q Some CoE members in 1996 were unhappy to be in a body with people who**

Sanef would like to thank  
all of its funders and sponsors  
over the past decade  
for their support



If only...

In a better world people would turn not to the guns, but to the pen and words to solve their differences. We at TOTAL salute the South African National Editors' Forum for always placing the power of the pen above the more violent option. Thank you for your consistent stance on the might of the written word.



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