

**ADDRESS BY PREMIER CHUPU STANLEY MATHABATHA,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE SABC LIMPOPO 85TH
BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION, HELD IN POLOKWANE ON THE
10th MARCH 2022.**

Programme facilitator

The national and regional leadership of the SABC;

Chairperson of the Limpopo House of Traditional Leaders,
Kgoshi Malesela Dikgale;

MEC for Sport, Art and Culture, Mme Thandi Moraka;

Executive Mayor of Polokwane Local Municipality, Cllr John
Mpe;

Friends from the Media;

Esteemed Guests;

Ladies and gentlemen:

Let me start by appreciating the SABC leadership for your generous invitation to this important birthday celebration. We are indeed honoured to be part of this 85th birthday celebration of our public broadcaster.

This is indeed a great milestone for the SABC and for our country as a whole. Very few individuals and organisations are able to witness this milestone.

The 85 years of the SABC is an achievement worthy of celebrations of a higher magnitude.

I am saying this because the SABC is one of the most strategic national assets of the people of South Africa.

Throughout the years, the SABC has championed the mandate to entertain, educate and inform our people with absolute distinctions.

The SABC has been in the forefront of broadcasting a South African and an African story, to the rest of the global community.

As government, we are able to speak with confidence in saying that the SABC has been and continue to be our reliable partner for development.

The many achievements of our government happened with the collaboration and support of the SABC as a public broadcaster.

Our democracy owes its strength to the work of the SABC;

Our communities owe most of the knowledge about developments in the world to the SABC;

The SABC has provided an unequalled stage for our artists to perform and showcase their God-given talents;

The story of South Africa has been and continue to be told from a South African perspective because of the relentless commitment of the SABC to our great nation.

I speak with confident when I say that this great organisation is counted amongst the few but best in the world.

The challenge for the SABC is to continue on this positive and progressive trajectory.

We know that your journey has not been without challenges.

As a matter of fact, the SABC had to be transformed from a state broadcaster to a public broadcaster that we know today.

There was a point in the history of this organisation where it was used as a mouthpiece of government and a brutal instrument of suppression.

When the ANC government took over, we made a commitment to build the SABC into a true modern public broadcaster. The defining feature of this modern public broadcaster was independence, impartiality and plurality of voices.

We are happy and will continue to support an SABC that tells it as it is and not as authorities want it to be.

We value, respect and support the editorial independence of the SABC.

The SABC must continue to reflect the beauty of our diversity.

Our different cultures, different languages and our different religions must continue to be reflected through the SABC.

The SABC must guard its independence with absolute jealousy.

The independence of the SABC does not mean antagonism with government or the ruling party.

I am saying this because other people understand independence to mean something different.

A healthy relationship between government and a public broadcaster is both complementary and contradictory.

The SABC should highlight the good story unfolding in our country, even if this makes government to shine.

At the same time, the SABC must highlight the wrongs that are happening even if this means putting the government in a negative light.

That's how a progressive public broadcaster contributes to nation building.

That's how you become a true pulse of our democracy.

Programme Facilitator

The independence of the media in general and the SABC in particular is not something that we can ever sacrifice, not even at the altar of political convenience.

It was President Mandela who reminded us that and I quote:

“A critical, independent and investigative press is the lifeblood of any democracy. The press must be free from state interference. It must have the economic strength to stand up to the flattery of government officials” close quote.

As you know, our struggle against apartheid was also a struggle for free and independent press.

We appreciate the fact that no nation can claim to be democratic without the right of the media to conduct its business free from repression and censorship.

We want to reiterate that Free Press is an active ingredient of a healthy democracy.

It is for this reason that journalists and all media practitioners must jealously guard against the erosion of this hard won freedom.

This includes the media's responsibility to report fairly and accurately. We normally refer to this as self-regulatory mechanism.

The media must always conduct its business with full knowledge that thousands of journalists laid down their lives for the freedom you are enjoying today.

They too wanted to operate in an environment where the freedom of press is constitutionally guaranteed.

We do not want those Journalists who are over-creative, I refer here to those journalists who just go behind the computer, thumb suck stories and refer to non-existent sources.

Such unethical behavior poses a grave danger to your profession.

Related to this are allegations of the so-called brown-envelope journalism.

Such tendencies are actually the greatest danger to the credibility of the media.

The lawyers say that justice must be done even though heavens may fall – I think this too should remain your attitude. The search for the truth must continue even if it means that heavens must fall.

Programme Facilitator

As a Premier for this Province I must say that I am particularly happy with the diversity of media organisations in this Province.

We have well established private radio stations and community radio stations which supplement our existing SABC radio stations.

All of these radio stations are doing a very good job.

In this regard, the SABC combo, being Thobela FM, Phalaphala FM and Munghana Lonene FM are leading the way.

It is the diversity of media voices that keep us on our toes, and this must continue.

I know that you have adopted a complementary and contradictory whenever you interact with us as government, which I have referred to earlier.

We appreciate that you expose our shortcomings and loud our successes, this is really good for our democracy.

While it is important for people to hear and read about corruption, political killings and the other negatives, it is equally important that the story of a Limpopo on the move should be told.

Ladies and Gentlemen

We all know that our celebrations are taking place at a time of great uncertainty in the world. Our world is on the brink of the 3rd World War. This is a war that is completely avoidable.

The ongoing war between Russia and NATO supported Ukraine risk delivering the entire global village to a 3rd World War.

This is certainly not where we all yearn to go.

There is a saying that in war times, the truth is the first causality of war. This appears to be the case even in this war.

The canning of Russia Today television represents a regression of the progress made in advancing freedom of speech.

People have been criticizing the position of our government on this unfolding war in Europe, not because our position is not clearer – but because people prefer that we take their preferred position.

To make our position even clearer, we are calling for the demilitarization of the world.

The fact that up to this day there are still countries with nuclear weapons should be our focus and concern.

Today we are on the brink of a nuclear war because the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty did not say anything about nuclear disarmament. This is what put all of us at a risk.

Today the world media, including the SABC is correctly focusing on the human impact of war. The stories that are being broadcast and printed are about the plight of innocent children, women and the elderly.

The focus and angle of the war stories is different when the war is being fought outside of Europe and the USA. This has to change.

The same empathy we express for the victims of war in Europe should be available when we report about Libya, Syria, Iraq and elsewhere in the world.

Even the language we should be consistent, when you speak about the Putin Administration, you should use the same terminology about President Paul Kagame's government – don't call it a regime.

I know that some of our biases are inherent and unconscious, but we need to be consistent because that's what our mandate demand of us.

Programme Facilitator

I should not spoil our birthday celebrations with a long political speech.

We wish the SABC another 85 years of vibrancy, dynamism, independence and impartiality.

Please continue to entertain, inform and educate our people.

I thank you! Inkomu! Nda!