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SHAPING THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Journalism Dialogues

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**Is the media sufficiently prepared to
cover the 2009 General Elections?**

NAYE LUPONDWANE: It is six after nine. Good morning and welcome. This is Morning Talk with me, Naye Lupondwane, and I am sitting in for Thebogo Matima who is currently indisposed. Right now we focus on a very interesting debate for us as persons who are in the media and the question we are asking is: “Is the media sufficiently democratically equipped to cover the 2009 Elections?” which you will understand the volatile status of our country politically and well ... the media is in the middle of it. We wouldn't have it otherwise. Well we have our guests in the studio who will give some insights on this very panel, beautiful panel discussion. We do have Anton Harber, Caxton, professor of journalism at Wits University. Good morning and welcome.

PROF. ANTON HARBER: Good morning.

LUPONDWANE: We do have Joe THLOLOE, our Press Ombudsman. Good morning to you, sir.

JOE THLOLOE: Good morning.

LUPONDWANE: And also we are supposed to be having Xolani Xundu, political editor at the SABC News, who we are hoping is on the way currently and Michelle Schmidt, Civil Society Outreach Manager. Good morning.

HEATHER ROBERTSON: Sorry it is not me. It is Heather Robertson.

LUPONDWANE: Beg your pardon. We are hoping to have a wonderful discussion nonetheless. Right: we are all wondering if the media is supposed to be doing this or that ... what the media is not supposed to be doing and most importantly what we as members of the media are expected to do, especially with regards to the elections come 2009.

First let us understand what this debate is all about. **fray**intermedia's Civil Society Outreach Manager is supposed to be the one that has organised this and I need you sir to give us some insights to ... can you share with us what the whole thing is behind the media having such rights in your understanding, is supposed to be.

HARBER: Well, the media in an election period has a very special responsibility. It has rights and responsibilities. Its rights are hopefully to be as free and open in what it pursues as possible, but in an election there are special responsibilities about being balanced about being fair, about giving equitable treatment to different parties about promoting voting, peaceful voting, participation and enriching the debate, hopefully above all else trying to ensure that voters go to the polls informed about their choices and are making informed and intelligent choices.

LUPONDWANE: Alright that is the perspective of Prof Harber. Now let's go to the Press Ombudsman: do you agree?

THLOLOE: Yes I certainly agree. The South African Press Code is very specific. The responsibility of journalists is to give society information and opinion that they can use to make decisions in their own lives, that is what the South African Press Code states. And that responsibility goes through, even through into the elections.

LUPONDWANE: Alright. Who has just joined us is our political editor at the SABC, Xolani Xundu. Good morning to you and welcome.

XOLANI XUNDU: Good morning.

LUPONDWANE: Your perspective: what do you think the media is supposed to be doing specifically with regards to the elections?

XUNDU: No look, as Pa Joe has said and Anton you know, ours is to make sure that we provide the voters with information that will enable them to make informed decisions during voting. And also it becomes critical for us, for example, as a public broadcaster, that in the period leading up to these elections we open up the political space and give ... to all the parties access to this information that they can use to make these informed decisions.

LUPONDWANE: Now Ms Robertson; could you give us some insights from your side?

ROBERTSON: I am Heather Robertson from the Sunday Times. I think what is really important is that journalists are human beings and they *do* have biases but what is important is actually for journalists to adhere to the Press Code, to actually, knowing that they do have biases, to still be fair in their coverage. I think there is a tendency across media – obviously the ANC has been the ruling party for the last 15 years – there is a tendency for that to be the dominant story.

This election is particularly interesting, because there is going to be, there is a new opposition party, COPE, which is challenging the ANC from within, because it is a breakaway and I think it is really up to journalists to be fair in the coverage of all parties and to stop sinking into the complacency of only covering the ruling party and its personalities. I think we need to start taking the manifestos of all the parties quite seriously, actually educating the electorate out there through the stories that we cover about what the principles of each of these parties are.

LUPONDWANE: Let's talk about accuracy as far as reporting of the media. Right now we speak of COPE and this is not a political party that is registered currently: how are we supposed to report as far as that is concerned, because COPE has a name, is not registered, in fact it is still disputed?

HARBER: I don't think one need be technical about it. It is a new party that is going through a process of registration that is clearly a player in the coming election and one has just got to deal with it that way factually. I don't think we ... it will be registered, and it will settle its' name issues ...

LUPONDWANE: In the sense we don't know whether the IEC has ... [intervenes].

HARBER: Well when that happens it will be reported, but for the moment they are ... [intervenes].

LUPONDWANE: We will take it as if it happened, it has already happened.

HARBER: No, no, we will take it ... treat them exactly as what they are, which is a new party going through a process of registration with a dispute over the name, but clearly a factor, a player in the election process.

LUPONDWANE: Now I am interested again on the focus of accuracy, we have always had this cloud above the heads of all media practitioners that we tend to misquote that or misrepresent this fact and all that. Is this supposed to be an issue as far as our members of the media are concerned?

THLOLOE: Again my responsibility as Press Ombudsman is to take any complaints that readers might have about any publication whether it is newspaper or magazine and there are plus-minus 700 publications in South Africa that subscribe to the South African Press Code and the Code says stories will have to be accurate, they have to be fair, they have to be balanced, they have to be in context and if there is a breach of any of that, the readers are free to complain to me. Now the measure I use is, I look at the number of complaints I get every year, probably around 120 serious complaints, and I compare that to the millions of words that are churned out by publications and I say to myself: this means that either we have very accurate reporting that takes place largely; alternatively people don't know or don't take advantage of the system to complain about what they regard as inaccurate, as unfair, as unbalanced.

LUPONDWANE: I need to know from the Sunday Times' Heather Robertson, deputy editor from the Sunday Times. I need to get the perspective of the Sunday Times: what is your stance as far as accuracy is concerned, because many of the times we tend to look at print media for, first the accuracy of it, and then later on we get to talk about what was happening and what did not happen.

ROBERTSON: The Sunday Times is quite an interesting case study, because we as Joe knows and Anton knows, we have gone through quite a

critical period where two of our stories have been taken to the Ombudsman and we have been found to have been incorrect: one is the story on the Land Bank and the other story is a story on Transnet, where we said that Transnet sold the sea to foreigners. But okay, we have an accuracy procedure, which every journalist and news editor should go through: basically when anyone is writing the story you need to be asking ... the reporter needs to be asking himself “Am I being used by anyone to push an agenda? Have I checked that the facts in this report that I have are completely correct? Have I checked ... have I written this thing in a balanced and fair way? Have I given every person that I have accused of or has been accused by anyone in the story of doing anything, have I give them the right of reply?”

Sometimes I think ... we have had, okay, two major complaints this year, a lot of the time reporters *do* do these checks, and that assists us in actually being fair and accurate. When we make mistakes we actually publish the corrections as soon as we know that we were indeed incorrect and as the Ombudsman dictates to us, we publish it on the front page as prominently as possible or if he insists in the inside of the paper. We have also undergone ... [intervenes].

LUPONDWANE: I am sorry, just before you move on: You say as “prominently as possible” ... [intervenes].

ROBERTSON: No, no, as the ... the Ombudsman would say, you need to publish this correction on page 1. You know it can't be the lead story; it would be on page 1, but that ... the most prominent place on a newspaper is the lead story, so it can't be that.

LUPONDWANE: Alright.

ROBERTSON: You obviously need new news on the ... as the lead story.

LUPONDWANE: Yes.

ROBERTSON: Ja we also ... our editor Mondli Makhanya has called in Anton Harber and a panel including Frans Kruger and a media ... [inaudible] Molele to actually investigate our processes, to see how the stories that we had to apologise for slipped through the cracks and we actually ... well in the next half an hour Mondli is busy addressing the staff on the recommendations that the panel have made to us. So I think it actually quite an opportune time for us to reflect and to actually fix areas where we may have gotten things and to actually strengthen our role as a newspaper, particularly in this pre-election period.

THLOLOE: There are a couple of things that I think I should mention here. The first is that the stock and trade of any publication, any medium, is its

credibility. So every editor strives to ensure that his publication, his radio station or his television channel adheres to the code, whatever code it might be. It might be the BCCSA Code, it might be the Press Ombudsman Code, but ultimately every editor wants to be accurate, to be fair, and to be balanced. Now almost everything that you and I know around us in the country, around the world, is what we pick up from the media, so the media are playing a very important role in our lives and we should grant them that they in fact keep us informed.

Now if there are mistakes where there is inaccuracy and if people make an effort to correct their systems like the Sunday Times is doing, we should applaud them for doing that, because they are trying to live up to the Code.

LUPONDWANE: Prof Harber: what the effects of such inaccuracies in various media institutions, whether it is radio or TV or print; what are the effects of such inaccuracies?

HARBER: Well it really depends on a number of things: it depends how major they are and it depends how quickly they are corrected. And I think corrections are very important. Everyone makes mistakes, particularly under the pressures in which news media are working, and what is actually critical is to correct those errors as quickly and as clearly and as soon as possible. And you know I want to add to what Joe says as I am involved in that panel

that has been working with the Sunday Times. I think they have to be commended for pulling in independent outsiders to say: tell us how to improve our systems. And we have laid out ways for them to increase accuracy and to increase corrections and hopefully at a time like this in particular all media is thinking about those things.

LUPONDWANE: So there is nothing bad that happens?

HARBER: Well, no, in some cases people get things wrong. They are or they should be disciplined, even dismissed, there is no doubt. I mean everyone makes mistakes and mistakes must be allowed for, but journalists who make consistent errors, who make very poor errors, there needs to be some kind of sanction within any media institution for that, and that is part of what we have dealt with in our report.

LUPONDWANE: Now I am interested as far as the SABC is concerned: Mr Xundu, do we have any systems that are there to make sure that we don't have such errors?

XUNDU: Look, unlike the print media, ours is ... it is likely to be faulted for example on misrepresentation of facts or bias where rather ... and internally, we do try, for example, through our checks and balances you know to make sure that we do give all the parties involved in the story the right for example

to reply and to be heard and also as a matter ... just as an example: we are dealing with a public broadcaster here, which is under enormous pressure as we move towards the elections.

And we have set up an internal ombudsman where everybody for example who has a gripe with the SABC or a story that we did can actually write and complain to. And that is in the spirit of making sure that we strengthen you know all these internal systems to make sure that we are as balanced and fair as is possible. I mean, look, for us the sound speaks for itself. I mean it is very unlikely that someone can say that we have misquoted you know ... we do get flack for example around issues of bias as I said and that is because of the journalists' points of view that is sometimes creeping into the story. But ... [intervenes].

LUPONDWANE: I am interested in that: the journalist's point of view comes into the story and yet there is supposed to be an editor. How does that happen?

XUNDU: No look, journalists are supposed to tell stories as they see them you know and that is very important to ... I mean the duty of the editor ... I mean I don't believe that it is basically to force journalists to see things in a particular way, but then what is important is that you allow these journalists their point of view ... I mean they are the people who cover the stories, they are the people who interact with various role-players. And it is they who have

much better understanding you know of what the story is, so you allow them that, but then of course as an editor, my role is to make sure that your story is balanced you know and that you have covered all angles, that you ask the questions that need to be asked.

LUPONDWANE: I am interested: if you are covering all angles then there won't be a possibility of bias is there? 0891 104 207 ... 0891 104 207. I need now to focus, for us to focus now on the issue of stories that have some factual errors in them and how is it especially in the case of print that these stories –regardless of the fact that these stories are in a small publication or a big publication – these stories are never regarded as so important that they are given headlines; and she [Heather Robertson] is saying it can't be headlines. The question is why?

HARBER: Are you asking why the correction or the apology can't be headlines?

LUPONDWANE: Ja, well especially if the story itself was a headline.

HARBER: Well I don't think it is an issue of whether it is a headline or not. If the error was a major page 1 error, the Ombudsman rules that the correction must be on page 1. You know the paper also has to serve its readers and if a correction is the page 1 lead in the Sunday Times, well I am

not sure that is serving anyone, you know I don't think that is serving a purpose, but if it is ... you know, the page 1 correction we are referring to on a particular story was as prominent as you could expect any correction to be. So I think I would certainly accept that whether or not it is at the top or lower down on the page is really to nitpick. The point is not to bury it inside the paper.

LUPONDWANE: Let's take some calls on the issue 0891 104 207, once again 0891 104 207. Xolani in Midrand. Good morning Xolani.

XOLANI: Good morning, sir. Thank you very much for taking my call. I just want to ask your panellists there with regards to the new constitutional party COPE: there were some complaints from other sectors that they are being covered too much by the journalists. So I just wanted to find out from them as journalists is this something of a concern or should people be concerned? Because I mean I want to believe that for me it is newsworthy because it is the break-up from the political party which is running the country at the moment. I am listening on the radio.

LUPONDWANE: Is your question directed at any particular of our guests?

XOLANI: Come again sir?

LUPONDWANE: Is your question directed at any particular one of our guests?

XOLANI: No not necessarily one; just all as journalists.

LUPONDWANE: Alright, we will first ask Mr THLOLOE to answer that.

THLOLOE: No, I think Xolani answered himself. The fact that it is a new party breaking away from the premier party in the country makes it news and that is why COPE has been getting the type of coverage it has been getting. The only time that you have had this type of coverage was when the PAC broke away from the ANC in 1958, which was a major story, and again now it is a major story. So the coverage in fact meets the requirements at the moment. If COPE does badly at the elections and becomes another minor party it is going to go down in the ratings and it is probably going to be covered less and less, but for now it is a major story: today they are in court fighting over the name. So that makes it a major story.

LUPONDWANE: Alright we will take another call from Mike in Middelburg. Mike?

MIKE: Hi and thanks for taking my call. Mine is on editorials: I want to check if editorials ... should it be a collective view of editorial staff or can the editor

as an individual formulate an opinion and put it across as editorially representative of the paper? The reason I am asking this question is an observation I have made over a period of time with regard to commentary on The Citizen newspaper. Martin Williams, who has been a permanent acting editor for that newspaper, the opinions that appear in that newspaper, you can actually read that there is no collective ownership from editorial staff. And when I enquired, because I became worried I phoned them, I was told that it is just a ... you can formulate an opinion as an individual. Is that a standard practice; is it allowed?

ROBERTSON: I can talk from experience with the Sunday Times, we ... the editorial that appears in the Sunday Times every Sunday is not ... it is not only the opinion of the editor of Mondli Makhanya. We, a collective of us, of editorial leadership, sit and debate the big issues of the week every Thursday and ultimately it definitely is a collective decision. And then sometimes the editor's, the editor's decision is dominant; other times there may be you know somebody's else ... somebody else's view which makes a stronger, more cogent argument than the editor. So it is a collective decision ultimately but led by the editor of the publication.

MIKE: Yes, I think that is very good and it must be encouraged, because you see newspapers like the Citizen newspaper, which used to be the mouthpiece of the apartheid regime in the past, continues unashamedly in

this day and age to be a mouthpiece of the DA for instance, but if they can take into cognisance the collective contribution of people like Steve Motale and other good journalists who work for the Citizen newspaper, the paper will be credible. Thank you.

THLOLOE: Let me again point out ... [intervenes].

LUPONDWANE: We are going to go back to you sir when we come from the news, because we need to break for the news headlines. We have Anton Harber who is a professor of journalism at Wits University, Joe THLOLOE who is the Press Ombudsman, Xolani Xundu who is the political editor at the SABC and we also have Ms Robertson from the Sunday Times, deputy editor from the Sunday Times. It is half past nine; we go back to the news headlines.

[Newsbreak].

Right, we are back. It is 25 and a half just before ten on SAfm, South Africa's news and information leader. Once again I will introduce you to our guests this morning: Anton Harber who is a professor of journalism at Wits University who will be leaving shortly so we will be focusing on you for a moment. And Joe THLOLOE who is Press Ombudsman, Xolani Xundu, political editor at the SABC, and Ms Robertson who is the deputy editor at the Sunday Times. Once again, good morning to all of you.

Now I need you to clarify a few points for us before you leave, Professor. When we speak of the media we always suppose it is the people who know what they are talking about and have valid sources to back it up and sometimes these sources turn out not to be accurate, so how do we handle the situation?

HARBER: Well I think we have to insist that newspapers and media generally is very carefully with sources. Sources should also be named; there are occasions – which should be rare – when sources cannot be named. They should be identified as closely as possible by saying a member of the ANC NEC or a tall member of the ANC NEC or a tall left-handed member of the ANC NEC. I am joking, but it is important to place that source in such a way that the reader can judge who it is that is speaking. Anonymous sources are to be used very sparingly and only when really essential and I think there is a danger that they are over- used, but otherwise sources must be named, identified and held accountable for what they are saying.

LUPONDWANE: Alright I am going to take Naeem who has been holding for quite some time. Good morning Naeem.

NAEEM: Hello; thanks. I have got quite a few points. I will try to be brief. Firstly there is a lack of diversity of opinion in opinion pieces, secondly there

is a very dangerous blurring of fact and opinion in news reports, thirdly there is a consistent ideological bias towards capitalism and this is seen very evidently in coverage of strikes. For example, the Woolworths strikes: you know if you would just read the mainstream print media you still don't even know what the actual issues are, they focus only on actual violence. Self-regulation is not good enough: implicit in the Code is, if you appeal to the Press Ombudsman you lose your legal right to ... your constitutional right of legal recourse, more troubling in the factual pieces: many times you only get half of the story. Particularly problematic at the moment is coverage of the DRC, Somalia and the piracy: we don't get the other half of the story.

In the DRC the president has been very, very autocratic, torturing people – and that that doesn't come through sufficiently. The piracy is a huge story: what motivates the pirate? It has actually got to do with environmental abuse of the Somali coast, but this is totally silent in the mainstream media. You know, there is a whole host of problems, political bias. I mean the print media is pro-capitalist, so pro-socialist viewpoints are marginalised and just let me just end on, you know there is this argument that well, if the media is bad they will lose sales and that. Fox News, which everybody can recognise to be totally biased, I think their growth is phenomenal. There is another whole host of issues that I can raise, but I think I have made sufficient points, maybe at a later point I can elaborate on others.

LUPONDWANE: Alright thanks very much. Perhaps the republicans will not complain about Fox News. Ayanda in Pretoria?

AYANDA: Yes sir. Alright thanks. I just have a few ... one comment actually on what ... [inaudible] correction on the front page of an article then it is not newsworthy. The point I just wanted to make is that if you make ... if your statement was incorrect then there are two people ... [inaudible] that are affected. You said that the role of the media is to inform the public to make correct decisions, now imagine if you publish ... [inaudible] not correct, now those people that are meant to use that information to make their decision then are actually going to make a decision on an incorrect information that is important and also the person who was reported incorrectly on, that person must also be actually affected therefore it is very important that you put it as a correction. Then it needs to be prominent on the front page of the newspaper so that everyone who would have been negatively affected by that ... [intervenes].

LUPONDWANE: You say prominent on the front page as if these are two different things. When you say “prominent” what do you mean?

AYANDA: Sorry?

LUPONDWANE: When you say they should be prominent on the front page of the newspaper?

AYANDA: I am saying I mean if the story was front page in the past or when you published it, then you feel that it should not be prominent now. The fact that it was a prominent, I mean, you put it in the front page then should be ... it should ... [inaudible] put it on the front page in order to make the correction, because those who are affected by that, they need to know that that story – if they were to make a decision on it – then in fact if they were to need that information to make a decision, then that information is not correct.

LUPONDWANE: Alright thank you very much.

AYANDA: For those people that are affected by that, it is important for them.

LUPONDWANE: Alright thank you very much Ayanda. Alright, I am sure you have already responded to this one unless you want to add on it?

ROBERTSON: Yes putting a correction on the front page of the paper is prominent. The only point that I made is that the correction obviously cannot lead the newspaper, but it will be given ... but the correction will be given great prominence on the front page of the paper if we are wrong.

LUPONDWANE: Is it correct to assume that the fact that it is on the front page it is already prominent?

ROBERTSON: Yes that is correct.

LUPONDWANE: Right, Professor: before you leave and I understand Ms Robertson also needs to leave soon; I need you to clarify a few things. The media constantly calls the newly or the new party Shikota. How correct is this?

HARBER: Well the media adopts nicknames and I don't think there is anything wrong with that. If there was a confusion over the name of the party, the party is probably the one to blame for that and they are bearing the consequences of the fact that the media didn't know what to call them and somebody used a clever name and it stuck. So if it is ... if people recognise it as the name and it is a nickname that makes people smile as we all are as we hear it, then I don't see any serious harm.

LUPONDWANE: Some members of the media are regarded as pro-capitalist and some anti-capitalist. How accurate is this?

HARBER: Well you know your caller had a point. It is true that our media is largely located in the centre of the political spectrum as is most of our politics, but it is a pity that there isn't more of an anti-capitalist socialist voice in the media. I think it is a pity, I think it would add to the debate, I think it would

enrich the debate. We have a strong trade union movement that positions itself, for example, and one would hope that they would get a ... they get *some* voice in the media, but more of a voice would be a better thing, so he is right ... he is right, although I would say that that pro-capitalist bias in our media does represent where the country's political debate is located, but it would be healthier if others who are to the left and to the right of that were able to articulate their views in the media more consistently.

LUPONDWANE: Objectivity: is it a reality or a phantom concept?

HARBER: You know, it not a word I use a great deal. I think it is important to be fair, I think it is important to be balanced. Objectivity is an aspiration for certain kinds and styles of journalism. When one writes a news report one aspires to be as neutral and as objective as possible in assessing the facts and trying to get to the truth. I think we are all aware that it is a goal not easily achieved, if achievable at all, but it still remains for a certain kind of journalism a valid aim and objective that one strives to ... you know, one can never achieve a 100% accuracy but one strives for accuracy. One can probably never achieve 100% objectivity, but it doesn't mean that in trying to write a news report where you need to take a neutral view of the facts and the situation that you shouldn't do it as best you can.

LUPONDWANE: With relevance of the stories and the importance of the stories, is it really possible to be objective and at the same time be fair in reporting especially in the context of various political parties?

HARBER: Well I would use the words fair, neutral and balanced rather than objective. One *does* come with the point of view, one *does* come with the history and a culture and a position in society that shapes one's point of view; I think one must be clear and one must be honest about that. And it also depends what kinds of writing one is doing: sometimes one is doing an analytical kind of writing, in which one's view can come through more as long as it is clear that one is doing that, but when one is doing a straight news report, one aims to be as neutral, balanced and fair as possible.

LUPONDWANE: Alright, just before Ms Robertson leaves, we need to focus a bit on the Sunday Times and on giving some perspective from the perspective of the Sunday Times. Generally we understand that it is well ... okay to have opinion pieces, but again certain opinion pieces tend to be well out of the acceptable lines of society. How has the Sunday Times fared on this point?

ROBERTSON: Could you give me an example of that what do you mean "out of acceptable lines"?

LUPONDWANE: Well for example we have the stories that have been regarded as racial stories or racist stories.

ROBERTSON: Okay I know for a fact that we don't publish racist opinion or racist stories. I think the one thing that the Sunday Times does is we abide and stand firmly by all the precepts of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, we believe in all the freedoms and we will fight fervently for them. As far as our opinion pages go, we are open to a range and diversity of opinions, but with the proviso that they are actually well-written and well-argued and that is where the editorial control *does* come in. And yes, we would welcome Left opinions, which we do publish, but they have got to be well-argued and fight for their space in our very limited opinion pages, because we have essentially two opinion, two leader pages in our paper. And yes so we invite opinions from across the spectrum, but they have got to be well-written and well-argued.

LUPONDWANE: And what about the letters to the editors?

ROBERTSON: Again we particularly, now over the last two years, have opened up the space for letters to the editor. We also have a website www.thetimes.co.za where readers are welcome to write and communicate with the editorial leadership of the Sunday Times and The Times, our daily newspaper. So the space has opened up, it has broadened: we have got our

letters pages and we have the website for this reader interactivity and engagement and we firmly believe it, I mean, we welcome opinion. Sometimes readers, for example with the launch of COPE, when they were ... readers all wrote about that and we got very little opinion on anything else. I mean, other times we get a great diversity and people talking about all aspects of society, all world events.

LUPONDWANE: Would I be correct to say that AZAPO was banned for the past four years?

ROBERTSON: What was banned?

LUPONDWANE: AZAPO.

ROBERTSON: Banned by who?

LUPONDWANE: By Sunday Times.

ROBERTSON: No.

LUPONDWANE: Am I correct?

ROBERTSON: No, AZAPO was not banned by the Sunday Times.

LUPONDWANE: And any story by them?

ROBERTSON: No.

LUPONDWANE: Not correct?

ROBERTSON: As I said, I will go back to my point: if a story is well-written and well-argued it would actually find space in the opinion pages of the Sunday Times and there is no political formation that has been banned by the Sunday Times.

LUPONDWANE: Alright we will take a break and come back shortly. Funane in East London?

FUNANE: Yes I was listening nicely. To follow up, you know I wanted to ask a question now that you guys have discussed; now it is a statement. You know for the past four, five years, I am the spokesperson for AZAPO in Western Cape and I am a member of the communication desk of AZAPO. We have sent press releases and most of them have been in almost every newspaper in this country except the Sunday Times for the past four, five years, so we have taken a decision as AZAPO that we would stop anything ... your lady is arguing that maybe we are not constructing our statements

well – well it finds space in other newspapers. So it is either our English is not up to scratch or there has been an editorial position taken by the Sunday Times to ban AZAPO. If the lady says AZAPO is not banished in that newspaper, is she able to tell what articles does she remember that was printed by her paper about AZAPO in the past four, five years; is she able to do that just one in the past four, five years? Thank you.

ROBERTSON: Sir I cannot tell you what news story has been printed about AZAPO in the past four, five years, but I think the one person who represents AZAPO that we *do* cover has indeed been Minister Mlusi Mangane and he has actually, if we are honest, been the one AZAPO person that has been actively engaged in activity that is of great public interest. If a press release or media statement is sent on a Monday for example to the Sunday Times, we are definitely not going to cover it, because that is old news: the Monday papers would have covered it. So I would recommend that if you do want to get coverage in the Sunday Times, to engage with reporters in your area, engage with us as the editors and if you have an opinion that you want to put across yes, as I said, our opinion pages are there, but if you want to get across news, there needs to be something for us to cover.

LUPONDWANE: Okay I am going to take a break and talk to Sandile and Pat. Thank you very much. Just before 10 on SAfm, South Africa's news and information leader. Now remaining as our guests we do have Joe THLOLOE

who is the Press Ombudsman, Xolani Xundu who is the political editor here at SABC News. Thank you very much for remaining with us. Now, you wanted to comment on something before we continue?

THLOLOE: In fact the caller Naeem said something that is not accurate. He said that the self-regulatory system takes away people's constitutional rights to go to the courts. That is not true. The truth is that when somebody brings a complaint to the Press Ombudsman, we always advise that person: make your choice at this point; if you want to go to the courts ultimately, if your intention is to sue or to get damages out of the publication, your best route is through the courts; but if your intention is to clear your name as quickly as possible and at no cost whatsoever, then use our system. So that is the intention of the system to clear your name as quickly as possible at no cost.

If you go to the courts you are going to spend money on lawyers, you are going to spend years trying to argue your case in court, but there are people who prefer to use our system, but what we say is make the choice right at the beginning, at that point. So we are not taking away that right, we are saying make that choice there, so that once you have gone through our system we don't then expect you to then go to the courts, use the information you picked up while you were handling the matter in the Ombudsman's office to go and tailor a case for the courts. That would not be fair on the publication.

LUPONDWANE: Now I want us to focus ... thank you very much for that. I want us to focus on the Journalism Dialogues, the once-a-month Journalism Dialogues: could you give us some more insight on that?

THLOLOE: In fact this is essentially part of our ... this broadcast in fact is essentially part of our Journalism Dialogues. They are being run by **fray**intermedia and the idea is to bring principal actors in our society together with the media and the public, to get together and discuss issues about media and coverage and I participated in those ... I participate in those because it gives me a chance to make people aware that there is the Press Ombudsman, there is the Press Code that they can use if they have got grievances.

We have had these Dialogues in Cape Town, in East London, in Durban, in Pretoria and in Johannesburg and ultimately the intention is to make people aware of the interaction between the media and society.

LUPONDWANE: What purpose mainly will this serve? Is it only interaction?

THLOLOE: The interaction essentially is designed to get better coverage of our society, to try and improve the standard of our journalism. Once the editors and the journalists know what the public out there thinks about them, once the principal actors in our society – the political parties, the business

people, etc. – know exactly what is happening in the media there is bound to be better coverage of our society.

LUPONDWANE: Alright let's go back to our callers we have Pat in Vryburg.
Good morning Pat.

PAT: ... [connection lost].

LUPONDWANE: Sandile in Durban.

SANDILE: Hello.

LUPONDWANE: Yes, good morning Sandile.

SANDILE: I am fine thanks and how are you?

LUPONDWANE: I am well thank you.

SANDILE: It is a pity the lady from the Sunday Times is gone. You know what it is very obvious is that the media is sidetracking the ANC. You don't have to be a scientist, rocket scientist for that matter. One simple example: there was a survey that was reported to ... it said ... [inaudible] 74% where it was located on page 15 of the Sunday Times, but the survey that said ANC is

losing support, it was the front-page news. I wanted to know how do they arrive at that decision in terms of printing the news. The negative news about the ANC seem to be exciting the media, hence they would go to the front page. The next day ... [inaudible] will go to page number 15, and also again, the issue of Malema. They kept on printing about Malema on the first pages but when ... [inaudible] is the same of COPE, it never appeared, so you don't have to be a scientist: it is very obvious that the media is biased against the ANC, but we can see through them, hence that is why Mbeki and his friends fooled themselves when they go into Polokwane that they will win, because the media kept on following them, whereas the emotions of the masses on the ground was different. That is all I wanted to say.

LUPONDWANE: Alright that is a comment not a question. Alright back to the SABC. What do we have as systems that are going to make sure that we as the SABC are not biased and are as well as expected?

XUNDU: Well look, we are being driven by newsworthiness in our stories and we must not forget that news is a value ... it is driven by a value system and also you know it is important to go back to the basics of journalism, reporting on issues fairly and in an unbiased manner and that is the commitment that as a public broadcaster we have made in the past and we are still going to make sure that we continue upholding and giving everybody a chance to equitably appear in our news.

LUPONDWANE: Alright, thirty seconds. Your last words.

XUNDU: Look, we are open and people are free you know ... [inaudible] political parties as we go into these elections to contact our internal ombudsman who will attend to their queries and complaints.

LUPONDWANE: Alright.

THLOLOE: I think the media are very competent to handle the coming elections in the same way as they have covered the past elections. The Media Monitoring Project has in fact issued reports after every election and every time the media in this country have done extremely well in terms of the services that the Media Monitoring Project has done. So I am convinced that we are ready and if there are people who have problems with the media, they are open to contact me at www.presscouncil.org.za.

LUPONDWANE: Alright thank you very much. That was Anton Harber, a professor of journalism at Wits University, Joe THLOLOE, Press Ombudsman, Xolani Xundu political editor at the SABC, and also Heather Robertson deputy editor at the Sunday Times. Now 10 o'clock and time for the news.