



RIGHT2KNOW

1st Floor, Community House, 41 Salt River Rd, Salt River, Cape Town
Tel: 021 447 1000 admin@r2k.org.za www.r2k.org.za

R2K STATEMENT: New Cabinet is a blow to the right to communicate

Issued by the Right2Know Campaign, 26 May 2014.

Yesterday President Zuma announced his new Cabinet including a new Ministry of Telecommunications and Postal Services and a reconceptualised Ministry of Communications.

Ministry of Communications: Ensuring the 'Good Story' get's told.

The new-look Ministry of Communications, led by Faith Muthambi, will be responsible for both overarching communication policy and spreading government information, publicity and branding of the country abroad.

By conflating communication policy and government propaganda the President is signaling an intention to ensure various institutions will be used to amplify government propaganda rather than to create a democratic communication system for all South Africans.

Of particular concern is Zuma's announcement that the new Communications Ministry will be "formed out of" the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (Icasa), the SA Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA). These are all bodies which have degrees of statutory independence from the Executive. They all have critical mandates to defend and advance our constitutional rights to freedom of expression and access to information.

We must now face the risk that the Ministry of Communications will be used to further weaken the regulatory capacity of Icasa and further undermine the already questionable independence of the SABC, all in service of creating a communication environment compliant to the needs of government messaging, rather than one which best serves the information needs of the people.

The Ministry will also be responsible for drafting government policies on broadcasting and the transformation of the print media. These are both long overdue interventions that should be aimed at diversifying the media landscape and ensuring the sustainability of public and community media. These sensitive regulatory processes must be undertaken to advance freedom of expression and press freedom in particular. They are now in the hands of a Minister with a mandate to ensure that government's 'good story' gets told.

Ministry of Telecommunications and Postal Services: Profit before People and Privacy.

The new Ministry of Telecommunications and Postal Services is led by former spy boss Siyabonga Cwele. The Right2Know Campaign has concerns about both the rationale for a new Ministry as well as the appropriateness of Siyabonga Cwele's appointment.

The increasing convergence of broadcasting and information communications telecommunications technologies (ICTs) has led to a global trend of convergence where broadcasting and telecommunications are increasingly integrated. President Zuma's three previous Ministers responsible for broadcasting and ICTs have all driven an integrated approach that has led to the ICT Green Paper currently in discussion. The new Ministry appears to be a set back that will undermine the ability of South Africa to harness the democratizing and developmental potentials of communication technologies.

Further, the President's stated intentions for the new Ministry places economic growth ahead of the ICT needs of our democracy and our people.

Information must flow across society and form the basis of a social dialogue that deepens our democracy and advances social, economic, and environmental justice. Instead the President has emphasized the economic value of an industry already defined by excessive monopolization, profiteering and the failure to provide affordable access to the majority of South Africans.

Globally, the revelations by NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden have shown why state surveillance and the right to privacy need to be at the centre of any government communications policy. In South Africa there is urgent need for both government and the private telecommunications sector to scrap policies and practices that allow ordinary South Africans' communications to be intercepted and their privacy to be violated.

Under Dr Cwele's stewardship of the Ministry of State Security, there have been growing concerns about the use and misuse of interception of communications. (Between 2008 and 2011 – the most recent statistics available through Parliament – there was a 170% increase in interception through the RICA system¹.) As former Minister of State Security, Dr Cwele refused to engage publically with the findings of the 2008 report of the Matthews Commission into abuses of power and privacy in state-security structures, helping to bury the report on a technicality and allowing government officials and Parliamentarians to refuse to even acknowledge the report's findings.

Both Ministries poses a potential threat to the Right2Know's Vula 'ma Connexion (open the connections) campaign for safe, quality and affordable access to communications.

We call on both the Ministers to commit to upholding and advancing our right to communicate– to receive and impart information and opinions – that is central to our right to know.

We are committed to engaging constantly with both Ministries to ensure that the Right2Know's *Preconditions for a Democratic Communication System*² are delivered in their term in office. We will intensify our campaign for a democratic communication system that is able to:

- Secure community ownership of networks
- Provide universal service and democratic use
- Protect digital rights of privacy and freedom of expression
- Utilize convergence for efficient digital delivery
- Enshrine the practice of net neutrality
- Acquire capital for network growth and economic sufficiency
- Maintain a vision of forward-thinking technology

ENDS

For Comment:

National Spokesperson: Murray Hunter 072 6725468

Media Freedom/Diversity Spokesperson: Julie Reid: 082 885 8969

Telecommunications Spokesperson: John Haffner 0603665880

Gauteng Spokesperson: Dale McKinley 072 429 4086

KZN Spokesperson: Nomvula Sikakane: 073 4882374

Statement online: <http://www.r2k.org.za/2014/05/26/new-zuma-cabinet/>

¹ See R2K's analysis at <http://www.r2k.org.za/2014/03/16/r2k-analysis-signs-of-a-deep-rot-in-state-security-structures/>

²<http://www.r2k.org.za/2014/03/28/right2know-releases-preconditions-for-a-democratic-broadcasting-telecommunications-system/>