

**Address by the Minister of Communications Ms Ayanda Dlodlo at the Menell
Media Exchange on Friday 11 August 2017 in Johannesburg**

1



***Programme Director,
The President of Duke University,
Members of the media present here today,
Distinguished guests,***

I am happy to join you at this important gathering and would like to commend you for the work you are doing. This is an important platform to reflect on the important role of media and to explore challenges faced by journalists in their work.

We meet two days after we commemorated Women's Day in South Africa, where we reflected on the achievements we have made in empowering women since the dawn of democracy. Sadly, we continue to read reports of women being abused, battered, raped or killed, often by those closest to them.

This poses a challenge on all of us to intensify the fight against the scourge of gender based violence. Heightening awareness and enforcement should not only happen during the month of August, but throughout the year, with the assistance of the media.

The media can play a pivotal role in educating our women about their rights and inform them where they can get help. Not all women are aware of the existence and the role of institutions such as the South African Human Rights Commission or Commission for Gender Equality. Many women do not know where to turn to when they have been abused or their rights violated. The poor and downtrodden struggle to access justice due to prohibitive legal costs and lack of information about how they can access assistance from government.

Programme Director,

Your theme "**Truth & Trust: Mapping Media's New Terrain**" could not have come at a better time as studies show trust in institutions continues to decline all over the world, and the media has not been spared.

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2

The 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer shows that media are trusted less in 82 per cent of the countries sampled. The study, which sampled 33 000 people in 28 countries via an online survey, revealed that trust in media declined from 51 per cent to 43 per cent and was at an all-time low in 17 countries.

It showed that more people have faith in the internet than traditional media. South Africa is not immune to people losing trust in institutions and the recent country report showed that trust in media was at 39 per cent.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today's theme reminds me of the words of Michel Foucault, the parent of post-modernist thinking, who famously declared that 'truth depends on who control discourse'. In essence Foucault argued that the strongest players in the industry determine the dominant narrative or what is news.

This view is echoed by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky in their famous book called Manufacturing Consent where they argued that news was determined by a few media corporations capable of reaching a larger audience.

Herman and Chomsky argue that these corporation's business model, rely on advertisers who sometimes do not support the publications or stories that oppose their interests or are controversial. To prevent the publication of anything oppositional, it means news must go through a number of filters resulting in false national consciousness that favours the most powerful.

This is one of the challenges faced by the media industry around the world and a clear demonstration of a relationship between the truth and power. South Africa must avoid following this trend, where media adopts a monopolistic approach to views instead of providing real facts for people to make up their minds. South Africans want to hear

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3

diverse views and new voices that tell their stories the way they understand them better.

This gathering must ponder how we can ensure that our media report fairly, objectively and that trust is restored? We must go back to basics on the role of media in South Africa. This role is best captured in the code of ethics and conduct for South African print and online media which states: “The media exists to serve society ... It enables citizens to make informed judgements on the issues of the day, a role whose centrality is recognized in the Constitution.” This is in line with the ANC’s National Democratic Revolution (NDR), that the media should contribute to the transformation of our country.

The accountability and fairness of reporting are central to the objective assessment of the gains of the NDR and this is the message OR Tambo and many others understood during their years in exile. In fact Tambo’s leadership demonstrated his profound understanding of the importance of the media as a vital platform to win the hearts and minds of the people and to change one dominant narrative.

For the media to fulfil this role of transforming our country they must ensure that news content is accurate and contains all the relevant facts. It also means they have to ask tough questions and verify every statement or fact. Unfortunately we all know that journalists work on tight deadlines and sometimes do not have enough time to verify each and every fact or statement.

For instance, the advisor to the Finance Minister Chris Malikané was recently reported to have called on South Africans to take up arms to achieve radical socio-economic freedom. But the Press Ombud later ruled that the article was misleading and unfair and that he never advocated for the taking of arms. However reputational damage to the affected person had already been done and almost cost him his job.

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4

I am making this example not to expose or degrade the media, but to highlight the importance of verifying facts and statements. By doing so we can restore trust in the media and at the same time build trust between individuals and our institutions.

For the media to transform our country, we must ensure that its ownership patterns reflect the demographics of society. We must also challenge the prevailing media narrative, which tends to conform to one dominant view. In a country as diverse as ours there is room for plurality of voices.

Plurality and diversity of voices creates informed citizenry that is empowered to make informed choices. It allows our democracy to remain robust and function better as citizens are able to constructively participate in matters of the state and those that affect their lives.

In conclusion,

The media is an important player in our democracy and in moving our country forward. I can assure you that your role will never be in doubt, and you must therefore continue to report freely and in line with our constitution. My government will continue to fight for the rights of journalists and will ensure that you are able to do your work without fear.

I wish you well in your deliberations.



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Thank you!