

SABC executive contradicts Ngubane

Tensions among directors of the SABC spilled out into the open on Tuesday, 20 November 2012, when the national broadcaster's suspended chief financial officer, Gugu Duda, moved to accuse the board of poor governance practices.



In a highly unusual act before Parliament's standing committee on public accounts (Scopa), Duda attempted to interrupt the hearing's question and answer session by giving contradictory views of what SABC chairman Ben Ngubane was telling Scopa. This is the latest saga of the fractious SABC board.

In September, Ngubane told Parliament that the corporation had become dysfunctional after the auditor-general reported that the SABC had missed most of its financial and operational targets last year. Ngubane also said the board had passed a vote of no confidence in one of its members, Cawe Mahlali, who has refused to step down. Mahlali was seated next to Duda during Tuesday's Scopa meeting.

SABC group CEO Lulama Mokhobo said the two members were using the provisions of the Broadcasting Act to continue to attend board meetings. "The act says that only the president, along with Parliament, can appoint or remove board members," Mokhobo said.

Contradicting other members of the board

Speaking during the Scopa meeting yesterday, Duda said she still did not know why she had been suspended. "I will not remain silent on this," she said.

However, Scopa chairman Themba Godi refused to let her continue, saying she had first to make written representations to the committee. "This has become a circus. Never before have we seen members of a board come here, contradicting other members of the board," Godi said. Turning to the other board members, Godi said: "How did we choose you? How did you get appointed?"

Ngubane told the committee that Duda had been suspended after the compilation of two reports by an external forensic auditor. However, he refused to say what internal charges Duda would face, or if they could be criminal in nature.

"What we need now is for the disciplinary hearings to go forward as quickly as possible," Ngubane said.

During the board's presentation it told the committee that the internal audit committee had not been formed, although the internal audit function was still operational.

Lack of internal controls

A Department of Communications official said Communications Minister Dina Pule had refused to endorse the appointment of the internal audit committee. This was because the committee was led by someone who did not have the required qualifications, the official said.

The head of the internal audit committee was supposed to be Clare O'Neil, who is an SABC board member.

Ngubane said discussions with the auditor-general, who is now the corporation's external auditor, was that the chairman of the internal audit committee needed to be an SABC board member, but did not necessarily have to have financial expertise or qualifications.

"O'Neil has been a successful business person and she helped the SABC collect monies that were owed to it by advertisers," he said.

MPs quizzed the SABC board members and executive management over the corporation's lack of internal controls. They were particularly worried that this would affect the R1.5bn government guarantee granted in 2010 to drive the broadcaster's turnaround strategy.

"'Government guarantee' are two words I don't want to hear again," Godi remarked.

African National Congress MP Sarah Mangeni, questioned Ngubane very closely, insisting that as chairman he should be the first to know about the public broadcaster's internal controls.

"We (as the board) only act on the information that is given to us. If you want someone who is active then you should get an executive chairman and not non-executives such as us," Ngubane said.

Source: I-Net Bridge via *Business Day*

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