

# Media may be declared essential service

WINDHOEK: Namibia's media sector will undergo a review to see if it is an essential service, a special committee told a public hearing on Thursday.



FreeDigitalPhotos

"There was an application by the national broadcaster Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) in December 2013 to declare the media sector as essential services," John Kwedhi chairman of the Essential Services Committee (ESC) told the hearing.

"The ESC was established last year and had its first meeting last August, where the application of the NBC was discussed. It was felt that we look at the whole media sector in total and conduct a public hearing which takes place today," Kwedhi added.

Employees in essential services are forbidden to legally strike. On the programme for Thursday's hearing, the category media was described as "media services -- including print, electronic, television and radio".

"There is nothing on record and not a single Government Gazette published which has categorised the media sector as essential services," Veteran journalist Eberhard Hofmann told the hearing. Hofmann chairs the Namibia Editors' Forum.

"The Forum is not in favour of having the media sector designated as essential services because it impacts on media practitioners' right to unionisation and the right to go on strike. The ILO (International Labour Organisation) does not have media categorised as essential services", he added.

According to Kwedhi, the ESC will study the oral and written submissions, compile a report with recommendations and send it to Labour Minister Doreen Sioka.

Other sectors in Namibia that might be declared as essential services to be examined by the ESC are mining operation services, air traffic control, railway transport and services in law courts.

The ESC is a statutory committee established in terms of the Labour Act. The ESC falls under the Labour Advisory Council.