



MEDIA STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ANNOUNCEMENT: MDDA URGES RESTRAINT IN THE MATTER BETWEEN ZCC AND TISO BLACKSTAR

Johannesburg, South Africa, 22 September 2017. The Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) has noted the sentiments expressed by the leadership of the Zion Christian Church as well as the South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF) appeal to the Zion Christian Church to withdraw its call on their members to stop buying newspaper titles owned by the Tiso Blackstar media group.

From the mid-19th century, communities of faith have played a central role in the development and funding of a vibrant and reflective secular media. Pioneers like Tiyo Soga, Mark Radebe, Abner Mapanya, Isaac Wauchope and Solomon Plaatjie edited and wrote for publications such as Isigidimi Sama Xosa, Moshupa Tsela, Ipepa lo Hlanga, Umteteleli wa Bantu, which chronicled events and issues of concern to African communities. It was the Morija Printing Works of the Lesotho Evangelical Church, the Swedish Lutheran mission in the Transvaal, and the printing and publishing facilities established by the Roman Catholic Church in Marianhill, that enabled the creation of spaces for the emergence of African viewpoints and consciousness in the media. Then, as today, there was a healthy tension in the media between commerce, politics and religion. Then, as today, religious leaders seized the opportunity to advance society working in partnership with the media.

More than a century later, we are custodians of a Constitutional Democracy, forged from this tradition of protest journalism and human rights. We have strong institutions through which citizens can lodge and seek resolution for their complaints or dissatisfaction with a service or misrepresentation. Having been birthed from the same constitution, the MDDA endorses freedom of expression and the right to disagree and condemns any form of infringement of these hard won rights. The community media sector, many of whose practitioners are both journalists and adherents of various faiths, are looking keenly at how Tiso Blackstar and the Zion Christian Church choose to resolve their differences. We appeal for both parties to find a resolution that strengthens media accountability and freedom of expression in the interest of social justice. The consequences of failing to find each other and to emerge in partnership are dire for our communities, local publishers and broadcasters.

The MDDA is a statutory development agency, deriving its mandate, from Section 16 and 32 of the Constitution Act No. 108 of 1996, thereby providing for freedom of expression and access to information. As a partnership between the South African Government and major print and broadcasting companies, it promotes and assists in the development of community media and small commercial media in South Africa and the transformation of the media, by providing support (financial, capacity building, etc.) in terms of the MDDA Act No 14 of 2002. It also aims to raise public awareness with regard to media development and diversity issues, and to encourage media literacy and a culture of reading. For further information: www.mdda.org.za

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