

## **“Is she man enough?”**

Address by Ferial Haffajee, SANEF Chairperson  
at a meeting of the International Women’s Media Foundation  
arranged by Paula Fray and Associates  
on Monday 17 July 2006

### INTRODUCTION

At the Mail&Guardian, we exist in a cocoon. Always have done, in fact. The reason the newspaper took so easily to a woman editor is that female leadership is in its DNA.

It’s also a PC newspaper, so it’s always valued gender equity and practiced it, though some of my sisters at the newspaper may not always agree.

Salad club#Zidane poster# who leads us at meetings  
Metro males

So, I was shocked at a recent SANEF AGM by the results of our research into a glass ceiling in the media industry. It paints a picture of an industry stuck in the dark ages – which in South Africa is pre-1994. Cosy boys clubs; frustrated senior female journalists for whom the promise of freedom is not arriving. I hope some of them are here today.

The Glass Ceiling study

Was done among SANEF members. Out of a universe of about 150 members, about 40 responded, most of them women which is probably an indication of interest. As Lizette Rabe who co-ordinated the study ascerbically noted, it’s taken SANEF THREE YEARS TO GET THE STUDY DONE.

It presents a scary picture.

- \* Intrinsic maleness of newsrooms and ingrained sense of entitlement
- \* Men don’t see the issue as important.

At our SANEF meeting, as this research was presented, an esteemed colleague blustered: never mind about that, when are we going to tackle female domination of the magazine industry?

Another: do we really have to give women four months maternity leave? It’s ridiculous. Why do I have to pay a premium for female skills. Eish!

In the report, women complained that senior female journalists took on the perceptions and prejudices of their male colleagues in order to win acceptance.

They complained that there is no emotional commitment to equity; it’s viewed as another box to tick. And they reported a backlash. Men affirming each other. In the ribald and irreverent atmosphere that is the newsroom, it’s become a topic of jibe and cynicism.

The golf course and the pub remain the main sites of doing business, making contacts. To play the game, you've got to imbibe this culture. So, women are frustrated because the workplace is still not delivering an atmosphere of empowerment.

#### WHAT SHALL WE DO?

I work in a happy empowering space, so my next comments may be coloured by that.

With a constitution and laws to back us up, there is no need to feel the victim. SANEF needs to lead by popularizing this research to our industry. We must take it into newsrooms, talk about it and show that non-sexism is a right of equal value to non-racialism.

Our research is qualitative and based on the SANEF membership lists. We need an industry wide-audit so we really know what's happening.

What are our owners going to do? We must develop a national plan, conscientise and then monitor. This is hard work but it must be done. Talk to them in their own language.

Also, accept that we are on the cusp of a wave: Phyllicia Oppelt; Debra Patta; Portia Kobue; Robyn Chalmers; Rehana Roussouw.

BUT...why is Paula Fray not running the SABC news and current affairs programme; why has Lakela Kaunda gone back to government and Pippa Green back to university?

Women make the major buying decisions; Daily Sun could not have a page 3 girls because their readers are a) conservative and b) female.

Keeping newspapers alive.

Years ago, we did not accept that it could be business as usual in the media when the impetus for racial transformation started.

We must not be: "Suprisingly reticent for such an attractive young woman."