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President of the Supreme Court of Appeal, Judge Molemela

Absa Group Chief Marketing Officer Mr Sydney Mbhele and your colleagues

All our sponsors who have made this event possible.

Thank you very much for being here.

Your support for this organisation goes a long way to strengthen the craft of Journalism, our Constitutional Democracy and promoting a transparent society.

My Colleagues at SANEF

Our deputy chair Tshamano Makhadi,

The Sanef executive and Council and our office colleagues, led by Executive Director.

Thank you very much for all your hard work to make this beautiful evening happen.

Ladies and gentleman, good evening.

Tonight, we gather for the last of our annual public calendar events for SANEF.

And what a year it has been!

Our country marked 30 years of our democracy.

Many of us, as individuals, communities and institutions reflected on the journey we have travelled the last three decades.

We reflected on the progress of the democratic project; the fundamental rights that define our freedom, our responsibility and our co-existence.

We reflected on our nation's development; the structure of our economy and the landscape of our society more broadly.

We certainly are not where we used to be as a nation. And for that we should be grateful.

But we certainly should be far ahead of where we are, and for that we must account.

We pondered on the concept of access; how it shapes our trajectory - access or lack thereof - to information; to opportunities and to systems that decide our sustainability and our future.

In the Media space - this year was a reminder of the important role we play and ought to play in the public information ecosystem. This role was best captured by the Supreme Court of Appeal - now led by our esteemed guest of honour, Judge Molemela.

In 2017 the court, affirming our right to Freedom of Expression, described the relationship between the Media and society as follows:

“The right to freedom of expression is one of a ‘web of mutually supporting rights’ that holds up the fabric of the constitutional order. The right is not limited to the right to speak, but also to receive information and ideas. The media hold a key position in society. They are not only protected by the right to freedom of expression but are also the ‘key facilitator and guarantor’ of the right. The media’s right to freedom of expression is thus not just (or even primarily) for the benefit of the media: it is for the benefit of the public.”

Colleagues, SANEF believes that in order to play this role meaningfully, Journalism needs to get three important things right:

We must develop the right skills to respond to the information needs of our society.

We must promote access to information more broadly

We must fight to remain sustainable

SANEF recognises that much more needs to be done to capacitate newsrooms and individual media practitioners to do their work accurately, fairly and with a level of depth and nuance that helps all of us make sense of our world.

Many times, we get it right. But at times we get it wrong. To do this right, as an industry we must be proactive to have foresight and make necessary interventions.

Take this year's election, for example.

Many newsrooms had to contend with a difficult reality, to cover South Africa's most complex and contested election, with significantly fewer teams with the least amount of collective institutional experience and, to throw a spanner in the works, at a time where electoral disinformation was at its highest.

This is why SANEF invested in training workshops across the country as well as developing our information portal to capacitate newsrooms with the tools and technical expertise they need to do this important work.

The feedback from the industry has really been encouraging. And I want to thank all our colleagues who were involved in that work and off course the Electoral Commission for partnering with us in that regard.

Similarly, we recognise that to get the SA media landscape fit for purpose, we must partner with various players to build technical reporting capacity in areas of public interest - be it Financial Journalism; Climate Change or Reporting in Indigenous Languages.

This is why we're excited about our partnership with the North West university to develop an academic programme to improve reportage in local languages. We believe this will be a game changer in strengthening Community journalism offering in particular.

Deputy Chair, access to information is a cornerstone of our democracy. This is why we must do all we can to remove structural bottlenecks that limit credible information to urban centres and class groupings. This underscores our commitment to promote community media organisations to fulfil their mandate without fear or prejudice.

We are pleased to report that our programme to support community media organisations across the country with relevant tools and expertise to conduct sustainable businesses has benefitted 15 of organisations to date. A further 35 entities have been given access to the model to develop and become sustainable independently.

I want to express my sincere gratitude to our team at the office and all council members who made this possible.

Sustainability of Journalism is our most pressing mandate.

As a result, many of you would have seen that we have begun knocking on your door to get support for the establishment of the Journalism Sustainability Fund.

The Fund is to support public interest journalism through grants, and to ensure that the work we do can no longer remain vulnerable to the economic complexities that face us as practitioners.

A significant amount of work has been done to get this project up and running. Our office together with our legal teams have been hard at work to ensure all compliance with the law and fiduciary responsibilities is adhered to as we set up its structures.

We have been humbled by the supportive response we have received from various organisations who see the need for and are committed to supporting Public Interest Journalism.

I am immensely grateful for the support I have received from colleagues who have led this project with me in the last year.

Your efforts are not in vain.

They are essential building blocks, laying the foundation for a better future for Journalism - One which serves the South African public with agility, excellence and credibility.

Ladies and gentlemen, none of the work of SANEF would be possible without the backing of every single one of you sitting here.

Therefore, we celebrate you tonight and wish you success and prosperity in what you do.

Thank you for keeping this wonderful craft of Journalism alive.

Enjoy your evening.

Ndiyabulela.