

Seychelles Media Commission

Complaint by the Chief Press Secretary against *Le Seychellois Hebdo*

Background:

The grievance is about a series of articles that contained serious allegations against the Secretary General in the Office of the President, Mrs. Lise Bastienne, that were published in *Le Seychellois Hebdo* on 13th September, 20th September, 27th September and 3rd October 2013. The Chief Press Secretary informed the Commission that there had been no attempt by *Le Seychellois Hebdo* to contact the Office of Mrs. Bastienne either to verify these allegations or to give her an opportunity to defend her name. The Editor of *Le Seychellois Hebdo* had turned down a request for an apology by Mrs. Bastienne's lawyer but, instead published a list of questions for Mrs. Bastienne to answer. According to the complainant, the Editor has published the same allegations on Facebook. The Chief Press Secretary made a complaint on 7th October 2013 to the Commission on behalf of the Office of the President. Following the complaint to the Commission, the Editor of *Le Seychellois Hebdo* forwarded a set of questions for Mrs. Bastienne to the Chief Press Secretary.

Methodology:

The Commission called in the Editor of *Le Seychellois Hebdo*, Mr. Gervais Henrie, for a hearing where he confirmed that **he did not deem it necessary to contact Mrs. Bastienne to verify the allegations so as not to blow the story**. Mr. Henrie further stated that he trusted his sources.

The Commission also requested from Mr. Henrie a statement in reply to the complaint and to show cause why action should not be taken against him.

In his statement Mr. Henrie reiterated that he did not contact Mrs. Bastienne for an interview because he was sure of the facts published.

According to *Le Seychellois Hebdo* of 20th September 2013, the letter from Mrs. Bastienne's lawyer had asked that "an apology be printed because she was not involved in the Marek Trajter's saga and cannot be implied in the corruption that occurred". Mr. Henrie insists she was involved in the case and this can be backed up in a court of law. However, Mr. Henrie accepts that he did not contact Mrs. Bastienne to verify the information he had, prior to publishing his story. In defending his stance, Mr. Henrie claimed the Chief Press Secretary and the Ministry for Home Affairs have consistently shown a hostile and non-responsive attitude towards his newspaper.

Although Mr. Henrie had offered no apology, his paper *Le Seychellois Hebdo* publicly stated that it would be "willing to apologise" and publish a front page apology if it was established that Mrs. Bastienne "was never involved in the process of facilitating" the granting of Seychellois citizenship to Mr. Marek Trajter or the subsequent withdrawal of the same. Concurrently with this offer, the paper published a series of specific questions for Mrs. Bastienne to respond to.

The Commission has considered the four articles that were published in *Le Seychellois Hebdo* and which are the subject of the complaint.

Findings:

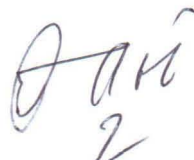
- 1.0 In line with the SMC Act 2010, the Commission finds that by publishing allegations which have not been verified, the **Editor of *Le Seychellois Hebdo* has acted in disregard to Article 13(2)e of the Act and Section 1 of the Code of Conduct for the Media in Seychelles.**

- 2.0 The Commission is of the view that if *Le Seychellois Hebdo* had been motivated by a sense of fair journalistic practice, it would not have published the series of questions prior to submitting them in writing to Mrs. Bastienne and giving a reasonable length of time to respond and defend herself.

The fact this did not happen smacks of “below-the-belt” behavior on the part of *Le Seychellois Hebdo*, which the Commission deplores and could constitute a possible violation of Section 4 of the Code of Conduct for the Media.

Ruling:

- 1.0 In view of the above ruling, the Commission requires that the Editor of *Le Seychellois Hebdo* publish in its next edition of the newspaper, with due prominence, an apology for publishing unverified and serious allegations in respect of the articles published on 13th September, 20th September, 27th September and 3rd October 2013.
- 2.0 *Le Seychellois Hebdo* should allow the aggrieved party a fair opportunity to reply to the allegations made in the newspaper.
- 3.0 The Commission calls on Public Institutions to be more responsive when contacted by the media and treat all media houses with fairness.



Ibrahim Afif

Chairperson & CEO

Seychelles Media Commission



28th November 2013