

Seychelles Media Commission

Complaint by the Seychelles National Party (SNP) against the Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation (SBC)

Background:

The SNP lodged a complaint with the Seychelles Media Commission on 14th October 2013 to express discontent at the way the SBC treated the political party's Annual Convention in its news bulletin.

The SNP is of the view that the SBC was unfair in the time allocated for coverage of the Convention and the Women's Association, compared to the length of time and number of reportages granted to other party conventions, especially that of *Parti Lepep*. The complaint also claims that the reportage on the Convention did not carry a single excerpt of any speech, except for two brief sentences from an interview, conducted outside the Convention, with the SNP Leader, Mr. Wavel Ramkalawan and the Chairperson of the SNP Women's Association, Mrs. Regina Alcindor

Methodology:

The Commission considered a statement provided by the SBC in respect of the complaint. In his defence, the CEO of the SBC, Mr. Antoine Onézime said that it was 'normal' for the ruling party's National Congress to get more airtime than others when it passes resolutions that have repercussions on the people and the country as it is the 'people's right to know'. He said that party political coverage outside election campaign is guided by the strength of the party in the last elections and that the SBC reserves the right to editorial control on all news stories.

Mr. Onézime said that the SBC was 'satisfied' that the news item on the SNP Convention passed the 5Ws and H¹ of news guidelines and that the treatment and presentation of the story was 'a matter of style and creativity of the journalist'.

The Commission also viewed the news report that was broadcast on SBC TV on Monday 7th October.

A copy of the speech delivered by the Leader of the SNP at the Convention was also considered.

Findings:

- 1.0 If the SBC wants to live up to the norms of impartiality as provided in Article 168² of the Constitution of the Republic of Seychelles, then the treatment given to the coverage of the Convention and the explanation provided leaves room to challenge the impartiality of the SBC.

- 2.0 The Commission has noted the SBC CEO's use of the phrase 'the people's right to know' in justifying the amount of time allocated for coverage of the ruling party's National Congress. However, the Commission is of the view that democracy also includes minority groups and political parties, which are in opposition and that in a healthy democracy the people also have a right to know why some of the decisions taken by the ruling party are being questioned.

¹ 5Ws and H – What, Where, When, Who, Why and How

² Article 168(1) The State shall ensure that all broadcasting media which it owns or controls or which receive a contribution from the public fund are so constituted and managed that they may operate independently of the State and of political or other influence of other bodies, persons or political Parties.

(2) The broadcasting media referred to in that clause shall, subject to this Constitution and any other laws, afford opportunities and facilities for the presentation of divergent views.

- 3.0 The news report on the Convention including the SNP Women's Association meeting was of duration 3 mins 18 secs.
- 4.0 There were no excerpts of the Party Leader's speech in the news report. However, three excerpts of interviews with the leader of the SNP (43 secs and 20 secs) and the Chairperson of the SNP Women's Association (25 secs) were used.

Ruling:

- 1.0 The broadcast report, when considered in the context of the complaint lodged and the defence offered by the SBC, **fails to uphold the principles enshrined in Article 168 of the Constitution of the Third Republic** and also **contravenes Articles 3(3)³ and 9(2)⁴ of the SBC Act 2011.**
- 2.0 The Commission recognises that there were extracts in the speech delivered by the SNP Leader which were allegations that could have been legally challenged and would therefore have failed the test of objectivity for inclusion in a news report. However, the SBC could have chosen from some other extracts which would then have enhanced the credibility of the Corporation and satisfied the principles in Article 168 of the Constitution and the SBC Act 2011.

³ The Corporation shall be independent and shall operate independently of the State and of the political or other influence of other bodies, persons or political parties.

⁴ The Board shall, in the discharge of its functions safeguard the citizen's right to be informed freely, truthfully and objectively on all matters of public interest, national or international, and presenting a fair and balanced flow of information including contrasting views without advocating any opinion or ideology of its own.

Recommendation:

- 1.0 The SBC should review its editorial policy in respect of coverage of political parties so as to ensure compliance with the 1993 Constitution and the SBC Act 2011.

- 2.0 Whilst the Commission recognises the impact that decisions taken by the ruling party may have on the population, the SBC should be fair and balanced when covering activities of all political parties and matters of public interest.



Ibrahim Afif
Chairperson & CEO



30th December 2013