

ANC veteran sounds alarm over media 'Self-Censorship'

Written by Sunny

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(GIN) – South Africa’s media organizations this week marked Black Wednesday, when the former apartheid regime outlawed The World and Weekend World newspapers and Pro Veritate (a Christian publication) for publishing ‘inflammatory material that threatened the nation’s security.’ Scores of critics and 19 black consciousness organizations were also detained on Oct. 19, 1977.

Yusuf Abramjee, chair of the National Editors’ Forum said it was important that the media industry in South Africa honor this day, especially now that media freedom is in the spotlight.

In August, the ANC party set off a storm of controversy with a proposed Tribunal and Public Information bill to check the press which, according to President Jacob Zuma, “tends to go overboard sometimes.”

The Tribunal would be government-run as opposed to the independent office of “press ombudsman” where a retired judge currently hears citizen complaints. Decisions are posted on the website: www.presscouncil.org.za The South African Press Code and other relevant documents are also posted there.

Writing against the Tribunal, the Professional Journalists Association urged the ANC to strengthen the office of ombudsman which “has operated reasonably well, with a host of decisions going against the media, who have been ordered to publish apologies and corrections, often on their front pages.”

Instead of a tribunal, some have suggested more self-regulation by the media themselves.

But ANC veteran Kader Asmal, in a speech at the University of Witwatersrand, warned that self-regulation could turn into self-censorship. "The "core element of a free press... is its right to determine its own opinions and to record the facts".

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Meanwhile, journalists and members of the public marched to Constitution Hill earlier in the day in a silent protest and the Right 2 Know campaign announced a week of protests against the bill, saying it would destroy civil society's ability to fight corruption.