

## EDITORIAL / REDAKSIONEEL

On the 19th of October 1996 an historic event occurred in Cape Town at the Unity Conference, when two years after the elections that brought democracy to South Africa, the creation of a South African National Editors Forum brought unity to the historically divided press in South Africa.

In a continent that is not renowned for press freedom, the emergence of a unified press, intent on preserving the freedom of the press is indeed a historic and noteworthy event. Although President Mandela constantly assures the press that "...media freedom is not, has not been and will never be under threat in our country..." some of the actions that immediately followed this historic event, risked spreading the perception that the government would like to tame the press.

The most extraordinary of these actions was the comment by President Mandela that as long as the Press is controlled by conservative whites we will continue to have a problem of senior black journalists expressing views which are not in conflict with their employers. By playing the race card in an indifferentiated manner, all black journalists have had their integrity and journalistic competence called into question. According to Anthony Johnson, effectively, elements within the ANC (including President Mandela) are accusing black journalists of betrayal - of their race, and by implication of their assumed duty and loyalty to the ruling party.

This event, coupled with a warning by President Mandela at a dinner for foreign correspondents that "...the time for white supremacy, for you to dictate to us, is over - it will never come back" raises uneasy debates about how the Fourth Estate is expected to transform itself to become part of the New South Africa in word and deed.

One hopes that the position of the press will always be expressed in the words of Moegsien Williams, editor of the Cape Times on television recently "...when they (government) get it right we will be their biggest fans, but when they get it wrong, we (the press) will be their fiercest critics."

Only then will we be able to believe that "...it is in the selfish interest of the ANC that we should have a probing robust and critical media, ... a questioning media that seeks to expose the weaknesses of our inherited bureaucracy, security forces, judiciary and, indeed, the new politicians themselves who can easily be corrupted by power."

*Sonja Verwey*