



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Remarks by the Minister of Tourism, Mmamoloko Kubayi-Ngubane, at launch of Telegram Newspaper, Johannesburg, Bank City

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Programme director/facilitator

Jeff Makhobo, Executive Mayor of the city of Johannesburg

Mbangwa Xaba, MANAGING EDITOR

Lumko Mtimde, advisor the Minister in the Presidency

Ladies and gentlemen

Good afternoon

Let me start by congratulating the management of The Telegram newspaper for this important milestone. It is a great pleasure for me to be part of this important launch of an alternative media platform that will add a progressive voice to the public discourse.

In their book titled “Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media”, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky describe the role of the mass media: “...as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace. It is their function to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behaviour that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society.”

In a country such as ours which is undergoing transformation to national democratic society we have to ask ourselves the question: what values, beliefs and codes of behaviour are our mass media inculcating in individuals in our society? We ask this question because it speaks directly to the responsibility that journalists and their media platforms have in the creation of society envisaged in the 1996 constitution.

Ours is a diverse society racially, religiously and culturally, and it follows from this fact that our society consists of a diversity of values, beliefs and codes of behaviour. Accordingly, spaces such as media platforms are a sight for contestation of ideas. In the broad spectrum of ideas in the public discourse each publication sets the limits of which ideas find expression and ultimately dominate the public discourse.

This means that those who report the news have choices to make about the kind of information they want the populace to consume. In this regard, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman warned that in much our mass media “The raw material of news must pass through successive filters, leaving only the cleansed residue fit to print. They fix the premises of discourse and interpretation, and the definition of what is newsworthy in the first place...”

They further observed that these filters in the newsroom ensure that there is no neutrality in the reporting of the news. In most cases “The elite domination of the media and marginalization of dissidents that results from the operation of these filters occurs so naturally that media news people, frequently operating with complete integrity and goodwill, are able to convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news “objectively” and on the basis of professional news values. Within the limits of the filter constraints they often are objective; the constraints are so powerful, and are built into the system in such a fundamental way, that alternative bases of news choices are hardly imaginable.”

I was pleased to read in my invitation letter to today’s launch a declaration by the founders of the Telegram that “the Telegram is founded by activists. As such, our business, is, in essence, to make ordinary people participate in the democratic system of government more meaningfully. We aim to give a voice to the voiceless, to profile black talent in business leadership, profile small businesses, report opportunities for small business and focus on service delivery for ordinary people.”

The invite further says that “the Telegram is not neutral. We take the side of the people in order to assist ordinary citizens in telling their stories. Beyond that, we hope to be their voice to influence decision making or at least help them make sense of the decisions made about them.”

This tells me that the Telegram aims to break the mould described by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman in which “elite domination of the media and marginalization of dissidents” are the order of the day.

We live in a society that is faced with the triple challenges of unemployment, inequality and poverty. The majority of South Africans are victims of these challenges. To have a wholly black-owned publication that has positioned itself to ‘give a voice to the voiceless, to profile black talent in business leadership, profile small businesses, report opportunities for small business and focus on service delivery for ordinary people’ is a welcomed development.

In a society with such challenges as I have mentioned social ills such as violent crimes, gender based violence and other crimes are bound to form part of our daily social experience. Indeed, this means that there is no shortage of negative stories for our journalists to write about. However, it is also important to remember that our country also has many positive stories to write about.

I say this because the stories that find expression in our media as a country become part of the totality that forms brand South Africa. To have a positive brand is very important for attracting investments all sectors of our economy more so in a sector like tourism.

Our experience with international tourists when they arrive in our country is that many of them have a perception that South Africa is a crime ridden country in which they have to worry about their safety everywhere they go. However, what is interesting is that, when they leave our country, the majority these tourists provide feedback that is contrary to their initial perception.

When we probe deeper about the origin of the perception many of the tourist tell us that they read about South Africa’s high crime rate in the local media. Three years ago I woke up to a headline that said, “Cape Town risks becoming ‘world’s most dangerous city” in one of our local newspapers. A simple google search about world’s most dangerous cities Cape Town was not even in the top ten.

The point I am making is that even though it is important to report about crime we also have a responsibility to ensure that we report accurately and not portray our country as a war zone.

In addition to discouraging investments in the economy and tourist from traveling to our country, negative stories also shape the negative attitudes South Africans have developed about themselves. These negative attitudes manifest in various destructive ways in our community which includes the destruction of public property that has become very prevalent. There are many South Africans who are doing great things that if reported more frequently to our media can give impetus to the fight against poverty, inequality and unemployment.

As we endeavour to recover and reconstruct the tourism sector that has been devastated by the Covid-19 pandemic, we will require multiple media platforms that will assist to communicate to all our stakeholders. We hope that the Telegram will assist in this endeavour.

In conclusion, as you assist ordinary citizens in telling their stories, I hope you do so with integrity and honesty so that you can inculcate values, beliefs, and codes of behaviour that are in accord with a non-racial, non-sexist and equal society that we seek to create. In the age of fake news, the emergence of credible alternative source of information is a very important development that should be welcomed.

Let me once again congratulate the management of the Telegram newspaper and wish you well as enter the brutally competitive media environment.

I thank you.