

Members of the Media

Thank you for honouring us with your presence at such short notice.

For the past 10 months, the Sunday Times has published a series of fabricated stories about me. I have kept quiet since the onslaught started.

After careful consideration, I have now decided to reveal the real reasons behind this persistent smear campaign against me. This campaign is not and was never a genuine journalist endeavor. It was a highly sophisticated plot to blackmail me. It is all about business and political interests related to the multi-billion rand set-top-box tender and related issues.

The Sunday Times handlers, who are high profile business people and politicians, thought that they could coerce me into a corner by threatening to make injurious revelations or accusations against me.

The intention was to force me to make decisions in their favour. When they realized that their threat of revealing accusations against me did not work, they then escalated their campaign with the hope that I will resign or that the President would fire me.

We have witnessed an extraordinary call by a newspaper that is supposed to be objective to the President to fire me. This is despite the fact that I should be presumed innocent until proven otherwise.

So far, the campaign has failed to achieve its objectives.

However, the handlers of the Sunday Times are becoming even more desperate because they have now realized that none of the spurious allegations against me will stick.

I respect and continue to cooperate with the investigations of the Parliament's Ethics Committee and the Public Protector.

Similarly, I have answered all the questions that the Ethics Committee requested me to answer. I will appear as directed before the Ethics Committee in Parliament on the 2nd and 3rd of May 2013.

I have not sought to frustrate these processes in any way. I will readily avail myself so that we can bring finality to these processes. I remain confident that I will be vindicated by these formal processes.

I want to make an appeal to the handlers of the Sunday Times to exercise patience and await the outcomes of these formal processes instead of churning out spurious and baseless allegations week in and week out in the hope of influencing the ongoing investigations.

It is common cause that the Sunday Times, in the main, has sought to project me as a corrupt minister who is hell bent on manipulating tender processes for the benefit of my alleged boyfriend, his friends and relatives.

They have not provided any shred of evidence that I have broken the law. They have failed to point to any wrongdoing on my part.

All what the Sunday Times has been doing over the past 10 months was to present allegations as fact, and misleading the public into believing the following (in the main):

- 1) That I am a corrupt minister who was bribed with a pair of shoes;
- 2) That I gave tenders to a boyfriend;
- 3) That I meddled in tender processes in order to benefit my boyfriend;
- 4) That I have ceded control of my department to a boyfriend; and
- 5) That I interfered in strategic appointment of officials and board members of state entities in order to appoint friends of the boyfriend.

Every allegation seemed to centre on the alleged boyfriend. The intention was to demonize me, turn the public opinion against me and intimidate me into not to making any decisions.

The latest article, published on Page 5 of the Sunday Times yesterday, headlined "Pule paper trail reveals how her lover's cronies got jobs" is consistent with what the Sunday Times has been doing against me over the past 10 months.

In this latest article, the Sunday Times boldly claims to have "seen a paper trail of memos detailing how Pule bypassed Treasury rules". It goes further to put it as a matter of fact that I, as the Minister, in their own words, "blew R2,6 million on a recruitment deal that led to the appointment of cronies of her boyfriend, Phosane Mingqibisa, to the boards of key parastatals".

This is an insult of the highest order. In another recent article, the Sunday Times even went as far as to suggest, also as a fact, that I, as the Minister, had "ceded control of the Department to my boyfriend".

These are serious damaging allegations. Anyone who makes them surely must do so with due care. They must satisfy themselves that they have proof to back them up, especially if their intention, like the Sunday Times has shown, is to get the Minister fired.

Unfortunately, the once objective field of journalism has now been reduced to slander and the spread of salacious rumours. Real investigative reporters do not subscribe to this kind of journalism.

The Sunday Times has willfully mislead, manipulated facts and distorted information in its passionate crusade against me.

Let us go back and take a look at this latest article in yesterday's Sunday Times.

In this latest article, the Sunday Times claims to have obtained “new documents” which purport to prove that I, as the Minister, bypassed Treasury regulations to “ensure that a recruitment firm, Mindworx, which has links to Mingqibisa and her office’s project manager, Andiswa Booysen, was awarded the R2,6 million deal without a bidding process”.

Like many others, this is admittedly a serious allegation against me. The Sunday Times appears so confident about the information in its possession that it has put this mere allegation as a fact.

But let us look at the so-called “proof” that is presented by Sunday Times to back up these serious allegation against me.

According to the article itself, the “new documents” referred to by the Sunday Times comprise of the following:

- 1) A letter dated 6 December 2011 in which I instructed the Director General to fill critical vacant posts by January 2012 and to fast-track the appointment of a recruitment agency to assist in the process; and
- 2) Other memos written by the Director General on 7 December 2012 and other officials in the Department which were apparently authorizing a deviation from procurement regulations to appoint Mindworx.

For purposes of transparency, I have decided to provide a copy of the 6 December 2011 letter to anyone who is interested to see it. This letter does not contain secrets. We have spoken publicly before about the need to recruit competent and skilled people to fill critical vacancies in the Department in order to improve service delivery.

It is shocking to say the least that a letter in which I make a legitimate instruction to the Director General to ensure the filling of critical vacant posts and to fast track the appointment of a recruitment agency can be criminalized and described as instruction to bypass Treasury rules.

The other memos or documents referred to in the Sunday Times article were generated by the Office of the Director General and her officials as part of their administrative processes which do not involve me as the Minister.

The Sunday Times knows this very well, as you will see in the letter provided, that my role in this matter was to simply issue a legitimate instruction the Director General. Nothing more, nothing less.

My letter does not instruct the Director General to appoint a specific recruitment agency nor does it seek to determine which procurement method must be used by the Department. The Department is on the record stating that supply chain rules were indeed followed.

However, despite being told this and despite failing to present anything to the contrary, the Sunday Times has decided to criminalize lawful government supply chain rules.

They even go as far as directly linking my name to the process even though they have all these documents which do not link me to the tender processes which were followed by the Department.

They have failed to link me to any wrongdoing because no link exists.

Despite their failure to provide evidence, the Sunday Times is brave enough to put it boldly in the newspaper that I, as the Minister, bypassed Treasury regulations.

Curiously, the Sunday Times does not quote or indicate as to which part or section of these Treasury regulations I am supposedly guilty of bypassing.

Treasury regulations are issued and updated by the Minister of Finance every year, and are generally voluminous in nature.

I and the Sunday Times readers, are expected to take a wild guess as to which of the many Treasury rules I am supposed to have broken or bypassed.

Unfortunately, this is an example of shoddy journalism. As members of the media, can you just imagine being accused in a national newspaper of bypassing some rules or regulations but you are not told which of these rules you have broken?

You are simply left to assume as to which of these rules you have broken! Do you think that is fair journalism? No I do not think so.

I have never tried to escape scrutiny or inquiry. Indeed, immediately after the first allegations relating to the inaugural ICT Indaba appeared in the Sunday Times I personally invited the Auditor General to conduct an investigation into the matter.

Whilst I knew I had done nothing wrong as I am not involved in any tender processes, I needed to establish that the tender processes that were followed by the officials in relation to the ICT Indaba were beyond reproach.

It is now common cause that after investigating the allegations, the Auditor General did not find any wrongdoing either on my part or on the part of the officials. The departmental processes are clean and will remain clean despite repeated and recycled lies in the Sunday Times.

As I have said before, I intend taking up this matter with the Press Ombudsman as there has been so many breaches of the Press Code by the Sunday Times.

The Sunday Times has crossed the line.

The newspaper and its editors have effectively charged me and found me guilty in the court of public opinion whilst they are fully aware of the ongoing investigations by the Public Protector and the Parliament's Ethics Committee.

The recent call made by the Sunday Times for the President to fire me even before the conclusion of these processes clearly demonstrates that the Sunday Times is not an objective and innocent messenger that it seeks to portray itself.

I was surprised that, when confronted about the controversial headline calling for my firing, the journalist who wrote the story distanced himself from the headline saying that it was done by his editor without his knowledge.

The Sunday Times editors know there is no evidence of wrongdoing on my part. If they do, they must tell the public and the law enforcement agencies.

Their intention is to sway public opinion against me. They also hope to influence the outcomes of the formal investigations currently underway in Parliament and by the Public Protector.

My responses to all Sunday Times questions have never been taken into account in the 10 months of this smear campaign. My responses were always quoted selectively, out of context and largely presented at the tail end of the stories. The inclusion of my comments in the stories was to simply maliciously comply with the requirements of fair and objective journalism.

My version has not been adequately and fairly represented. The Sunday Times has refused to allow facts to stand in the way of their campaign.

This is yellow journalism; a desperate campaign to ensure my downfall.

Journalism Malpractice on the part of the Sunday Times

Today, I intend to reveal the real reasons the Sunday Times and its handlers have decided to concoct a story line to project me as this devious Minister hell bent on meddling in tender processes.

We have known since the beginning of this smear campaign what is actually behind these fabricated stories.

I will later return to the various allegations made against me by the Sunday Times from the very beginning. Please allow me to deal with the real reasons I am being persecuted by the Sunday Times and its handlers.

This so-called expose is nothing but a highly sophisticated campaign to blackmail me.

I believe that freedom of expression and the right to freedom of speech must be upheld. But freedom of expression should not be a one way street and should never be abused by those who control media platforms.

This unusual step I am taking today of revealing the unbecoming conduct of journalists should not be interpreted as an attack on the media in general or on the right of South African journalists to do their work.

Despite the way I have been treated by the media, being hounded and mistreated, I will continue to hold many South African journalists in high esteem due to their dedication to bringing out the ills of society.

I am doing this because the public has the right to be informed about the unacceptable behavior of some Sunday Times journalists whose conduct, I believe, has blemished the noble profession of journalism.

Ladies and gentlemen

Allow me to unpack the details of the intricate 10-month-long smear campaign against me by the Sunday Times. The campaign began in June last year, just under a week after we had hosted the most successful ICT Indaba in Cape Town in June last year.

The first of the articles in the Sunday Times claimed that sponsors were furious that millions in sponsorship fees were drawn from the account of the event organizer by a man who is alleged to be romantically linked to me.

Now the Sunday Times no longer talk about the missing millions because it has been proven that sponsors of the ICT Indaba received value for money.

The link between set-top-box tender and Sunday Times handlers

Immediately after the first story came out, the smear campaign was swiftly take over, with the collaboration of Sunday Times journalists, by business people and politicians with interests in the tender for the manufacture of set-top boxes as part of digital migration.

It was later also joined by opportunistic individuals, including current and former officials in the Department and in the state owned companies under my watch.

It is common knowledge that the set-top-box tender involves billions of rands. The process to finalise the tender is still underway having been delayed by litigation from interested parties.

The stakes are very high and some unscrupulous individuals are so desperate to secure the set-top-box tender. They are willing to do anything, including using journalists to smear the minister.

Shockinglly, they found a willing partner in the Sunday Times. Their plan was simple yet highly sophisticated in its implementation. These people are desperate and they will not allow anything to stand in their way.

In their fantasy world, they believed that I, as the Minister, have the power to decide who should be awarded the tender.

It appears their theory was that if they could get me to cooperate with them they will have a better chance of winning the tender.

The Sunday Times has effectively become a vehicle to drive the campaign against me as part of sophisticated scheme to get me to cooperate with these unscrupulous business people.

Based on legal considerations, I have decided not to name and shame the business people, politicians and other role players who commandeered the campaign for their own ends. However, they are known to me and to the Sunday Times.

Perhaps, the Sunday Times can reveal the names of these individuals I am referring to here.

The three Sunday Times journalists behind the fabricated stories against me, namely Leonard Ndzhukula aka Mzilkazi wa Afrika, Rob Rose and Stephan Hofstatter, are associated with a network of business people, politicians and other roles players with vested interests in the work that we do.

For the past 10 months, before their stories would be published in the Sunday Times, mostly on the front page, these journalists usually report and boast to their handlers that they have "again nailed me".

I have been provided with proof of this unethical correspondences between Sunday Times journalists and their handlers, which is a shame for South African journalism.

Journalists as mercenaries for powerful business people

I will start with Wa Afrika, a journalist with a highly questionable and colourful background. He has a close association with business people and politicians who have bid for the set-top-box tender in the Department.

You will recall that a few years ago, Wa Afrika was fired by the former Sunday Times editor Mondli Makhanya for conflict of interest because of his tendency to develop unsavory ties with sources.

While he was out of work, Wa Afrika became involved in many business ventures and pursued various business opportunities. It is these extensive business networks that Wa Afrika pursued that have now come back to disgrace the Sunday Times.

We have established that one of the business opportunities Wa Afrika pursued involved importing cheap celphones from China. The Department oversees the regulation of the cellphone industry.

At the centre of the cellphone venture were these prominent business people who have developed an insatiable appetite in the set-top-box tender.

Officially, Wa Afrika is supposed to be no longer involved in business. However, he has maintained networks with prominent business people.

Wa Afrika's return to the Sunday Times as a journalist, has given his network of associates and friends a media ally whom they use to further their financial interests.

On the Sunday when the Sunday Times published their first article against me, I received a call from Wa Afrika's associates proposing to facilitate a meeting between me and Wa Afrika, and promising to assist me to make the story disappear.

These are the very same people who have submitted a bid for the set-top-box tender. In their own words, they said to me, and I quote: "Minister, we can help you manage that young man, Mzilikazi, because he is our man. We raised him"

They explained that because of their close ties with Wa Afrika they had the ability to prevail upon him to leave the story against me.

On 18 June 2012, the day after the first story was published; I received another telephone call from Wa Afrika's associates inviting me to attend a meeting at a Sandton hotel. They indicated to me that Wa Afrika had been invited to the same meeting.

Despite my initial reservations, and after careful consideration, I decided to attend the meeting which took place on 19 June 2013. The reason I attended the meeting was to establish the issues that were behind the story.

I, however, decided that I will not go to such a meeting alone and therefore asked one of the officials in the department to accompany me to the meeting.

During the said meeting, in the presence of his associates, Wa Afrika claimed to have a pile of information pointing to wrongdoing on my part. He said he was willing to quash the information he had in his possession on condition that I considered the following startling proposals that he made to me in the presence of his associates:

- 1) That I should provide incriminating information about the President; and
- 2) That I should give him another story about corruption either in the department or the state owned companies that report to me.

Wa Afrika said he could not just let the story against me die as his comrades are already running the story. He said he would have to give them something else in order to divert their attention away from me.

For the record, I rejected all of the proposals made by Wa Afrika and his associates during the meeting in Sandton as I found them to be highly unethical and inappropriate. I also felt offended by the fact that Wa Afrika and his associates saw nothing wrong in making such proposals to me.

It is important to note that at that stage when we had the meeting in Sandton, I had not met with Wa Afrika and/or his colleagues before in relation to the story. In fact, the Sandton meeting was the first and only meeting I have ever had with Wa Afrika in relation to these matters.

After the said encounter with Wa Afrika, I lost respect and regard for this journalist. I was utterly disappointed that Wa Afrika had become entangled in party political issues which were raging ahead of the Mangaung Elective Conference of the ANC and that he and his associates had thought that based on threats of spreading injurious accusations against me I would stoop so low in my engagements with them.

As members of the media, don't you think it is a bit curious that my first and only meeting with Wa Afrika, who is supposed to be an objective investigative journalist, was convened by business people who have submitted a bid for the set-top-box tender?

Subsequent to the meeting with Wa Afrika and his associates, during the same period after the first article was published, I also received another call, this time from a close relative of Wa Afrika.

The close relative promised me that he would prevail upon Wa Afrika to abandon the campaign against me. There were many unsuccessful attempts by this close relative to secure a meeting with me.

The close relative was so desperate to meet with me that he went as far as agreeing to meet with me whilst I was doing my hair at a Pretoria beauty salon where he personally made the proposal to talk to Wa Afrika about the story. This close relative also went as far as to propose love to me.

Of course, all these proposals were rejected. I am now informed that Wa Afrika is claiming that I have an affair with his close relative referred to here.

He claims to have broken ties with the said close relative because of the alleged affair with me. He says it was during a family meeting where it was decided that because of this alleged affair the close relative must not call him or contact him despite their close relationship. He claims I have enjoyed this after with his close relative for the past four years. This allegation of romantic liaison with his relative is just as laughable as the others the Sunday Times has made against me.

As members of the media, you also need to ask the following questions:

- Why did business people and Wa Afrika's relative believe that they can influence Wa Afrika?;
- Why did Wa Afrika agree to participate in a meeting which was clearly designed to blackmail and/or coerce me into cooperating with business people who have interest in set-top-box tender?;
- Why did Wa Afrika agree to attend a meeting which had been called by third parties who had nothing to do with the story he had been working on?; and

- Why was Wa Afrika comfortable to reveal extensive detail and information that he and his colleagues at the Sunday Times had been working on in the presence of these business people?
- Why did Wa Afrika trust these business people who had invited him to the meeting to such an extent of making proposals to me such as the request to trade information in exchange of abandoning the campaign against me?

During the course of this 10 month campaign against me, I have received so much support from my friends, and comrades. Some people felt that what I have been subjected to by the Sunday Times was unfair.

Some people offered assist. Others offered to speak to the Sunday Times editors and journalists to leave me alone.

It is sad that some of these individuals who offered to assist me were actually sent by the Sunday Times journalists to me as a ploy to extract information indirectly for the purpose of their stories.

In one such instance, a woman who claimed to be an associate of Mr Stephan Hofstatter, another of the Sunday Times journalists, misrepresented her intentions to me, offering to work for me as my Special Advisor.

She claimed to be close to Hofstatter, which we now know is true, and offered to assist me to “manage” the journalist. She said she could even arrange for me to meet with Hofstatter over tea.

She said because of her close relationship with Hofstatter, she could make the story disappear within weeks. In return, she asked that I appoint her as Special Adviser to the Minister.

The said woman held a series of meetings with the Sunday Times journalists, occasionally briefing them about my conversations with her.

I learned of her nefarious activities after she was overheard by an official who work in the Social Development. The woman had asked to have a meeting with me.

This official had overheard her conversation with me. Immediately after I had agreed to meet with her, the woman phoned Hofstatter to report that she had successfully managed to secure a meeting with me.

Fortunately, all of this was overheard and I was warned to be cautious when dealing with this woman. Out of curiosity and to develop a better understanding the smear campaign I went to meet with this woman in Johannesburg.

During the meeting, the woman appeared to know much of the DoC and the officials who work there. She indicated that she had in the past received business from the department.

After this meeting, I managed to confirm that the real intention of this woman and Hofstatter was to plant her in my office as Special Adviser with the hope that they would be able to find some wrongdoing on my part.

Fortunately, I was able to uncover her real intentions and broke ties with her. We also equally aware that Sunday Times journalists have friends within my department and in the various state-owned entities, some of whom have an axe to grind for whatever reason.

We know that the first story in which the Sunday Times alleged that millions donated by sponsors for the ICT Indaba were missing, an allegation which has since been shown to be untrue, came from a close-friend of Mr Rob Rose, another journalist involved in the smear campaign against me.

The close-friend of Rose is actually a high-ranking official in the one of the companies which sponsored the ICT Indaba. This high-ranking official has friends with business interests in the ICT sector.

For the record, the ICT Indaba held last year, which the Sunday Times has sought to vilify, was a resounding success. The conference placed Africa on the global ICT map. The partnerships with the UN's International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and all the various sponsors attest to that and it was hailed internationally as a success.

A first of its kind, the event attracted 1 500 delegates, among them the world's leading ICT experts, more than 20 ministers and deputy ministers from across Africa and the rest of the world, and 89 international media organisations. They discussed ways Africa could claim its rightful place in the technology revolution and use ICT to achieve developmental goals.

Deputy Secretary General of the ITU Houlin Zhao, who attended the Indaba and was one of the key guest speakers, said the Indaba served a meaningful role in helping South Africa and the rest of the continent find practical solutions to their development goals.

The concept of the ICT Indaba was proposed by Carol Boucher Designs (CBD) as early as August 2010. The DoC saw value in the proposal and then established an internal committee to work towards hosting such an event.

To assist in making this event a reality R10 million was committed to secure the venue, conference speakers, the audio systems and interpreters. The rest of the funds were expected to be raised from sponsors. To aid the securing of sponsorships, endorsement letters were also issued as is required by the industry.

Due process in-line with procurement policies and processes as prescribed by National Treasury were followed in appointing Carol Boucher Designs as the service provider for the ICT Indaba 2012. These guidelines are contained in the Practice Note SCM 11 of 2008. As expected for a project of this magnitude Carol Boucher Designs duly submitted a preliminary close-out report and an audited report on the finances to the DoC.

As stated before, the Auditor General audited the processes and found that the Minister and all the officials of the DoC followed proper processes and procedures in engaging the service provider and in executing the Indaba.

I believe it is important that the ICT Indaba must be seen for what it was – an opportunity for South Africa to create a positive legacy for the continent and its people. The event attracted R16,3-million worth of positive global publicity, and has helped position South Africa as being at the forefront of driving access to ICT in Africa.

When I assumed my duties at the end of October 2011 the ICT Indaba was already a departmental project and in March 2012 the project assumed national importance after Cabinet approval.

Hence Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe opened the Indaba on 05 June 2012. It is interesting that in their first story about the ICT Indaba, the Sunday Times had stated as a fact that President Zuma had addressed the conference when it was not so.

They have never corrected the inaccuracy. One has to wonder whether such slipups and the failure to correct them are a reflection of the standard of journalism at the Sunday Times.

For my part, I believe the DoC delivered a quality conference of international standing. I would like to thank Telkom SA, Vodacom, MTN, SABC, MultiChoice and all the other sponsors for their support of the Indaba through sponsorships. We value the relationships we have with the private sector. Without these companies' input and support, the ICT Indaba would not have been possible.

I would also like to acknowledge the Office of the Auditor General for their work in assisting the DoC in adhering to good corporate governance.

The DoC has always believed that the processes we followed were open and transparent.

In conclusion, I would like to announce that the Department and I will no longer take any further questions on these matters beyond today to allow space for the Public Protector and the Parliament's Ethics Committee to conduct their investigations against me without any hindrance.

I remain fully committed and focused on my responsibilities to deliver quality ICT services to South Africans and help create much-needed jobs in our economy.

I remain unshaken and I will continue to make decisions without fear or favour in terms of the Constitution.

I thank you