



Campaign for Free Expression Statement

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CFE Deplores Sinister Attacks on Journalists by KwaZulu-Natal Police Commissioner

The Campaign for Free Expression (CFE) expresses grave concern at the remarks made by Lieutenant-General Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi, KwaZulu-Natal's Provincial Police Commissioner, during his testimony before Parliament's Ad Hoc Committee investigating his allegations of political interference in policing and criminal infiltration of the criminal justice system.

Parliament is our highest oversight and accountability body, tasked with holding the National Executive to account. Within its precincts, the freest possible expression must be safeguarded to ensure testimony can be provided without fear or favour. It is right and proper that General Mkhwanazi be given full latitude to set out his claims, and that Parliament engage and interrogate them with the seriousness they demand.

Yet, General Mkhwanazi's accusations against members of the media are particularly sinister. They are made without any substantiation and, alarmingly, he follows up on his accusations by exhorting the country's security services to conduct counter-intelligence operations against these journalists and suggesting they deserve jail-time. Such exhortations do not merely impugn reputations; they place journalists in real danger, and threaten those who might approach them with vital disclosures about wrongdoing.

At a time when our criminal justice cluster resembles nothing so much as a toxic vipers' nest, the work of credible, verified journalism is indispensable. Journalists, often operating under threat, have provided the public with critical insight into the activities of the security and justice sectors. It is essential that they be able to continue to do so.

Threats and sinister innuendo against journalists issued from the halls of the National Assembly disable rather than advance accountability.

This is not to suggest that journalists are beyond criticism. They can and do err – as we saw during State Capture. And yet without the media, the full predations of the state's capture would never have been exposed. But accusations of misconduct require evidence, not insinuation. Without substantiation, they serve only to erode public trust, chill whistle-blowing, and embolden those who profit from secrecy.

CFE calls on:

Parliament's Ad Hoc Committee to ensure that privilege is not abused as a platform for unverified smears;

The National Assembly to reaffirm the indispensable role of media freedom in democratic oversight; and

The South African Police Service to repudiate any suggestion that counter-intelligence operations be conducted against journalists or news organisations.

South Africa cannot rebuild faith in its policing and justice institutions by silencing those who seek to reveal the truth. Free expression and a free press are not the enemies of accountability. They are its precondition.

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