

# Editorial: Press on

November 10 2011 at 03:23pm



INLSA Archbishop Thabo Cecil Makgoba. Photo:

David Ritchie

SOUTH Africa has a free press, thanks to the constitution that was thrashed out as the bedrock of the new South Africa 17 years ago. As with anything, this freedom is open to abuse and not always fully representative, but that's the risk you take when building democratic principles and values in a transparent society.

Now the Press Freedom Commission has invited the public to get involved and contribute ideas about what constitutes press freedom, and how to shape the regulatory framework of the press.

The commission was established in July, amid ruling party threats to dilute media freedom in the form of legislation and the establishment of a media appeals tribunal.

The commission is not an in-house body consisting of journalists who could be accused of being overly protective of their own territory. Rather, it is an independent body of nine commissioners that include eminent South Africans such as Justice Pius Langa and Archbishop Thabo Makgoba.

The deadline for submissions is the end of the month, and the response so far has been poor. At last count, only 20 submissions had been received, according to commission project director Mathatha Tsedu.

Of the handful of submissions, most have been from individuals, and the commission has urged journalists and government officials also to make their input to a report that is due out by March next year.

The scope for input is wide-ranging, and even includes views about various options of media regulation – independent regulation, co-regulation, self-regulation or statutory regulation.

People may also offer a critique of the existing regulatory system of the Ombudsman's Office and the recently revised Press Code.

“We hope South Africans will take advantage of this exercise to make inputs that will help the commission fulfil its mandate of crafting recommendations for a gold standard regulatory system suitable for our country,” said the commission.

The nine commissioners have an important mandate. Their findings can have far-reaching implications not only for the media but the public at large. It would be foolish to ignore the call to get involved.

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