

SADC Media Awards entries now open

Entries to the 2015 South African Chapter of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Media Awards competition are officially open...



Faith Muthambi: Negative stories about the continent scare away investors. (Image: GCIS)

The awards, which aim at encouraging journalists in member states to report on cross-border issues pertaining to the region as well as to recognise excellence in journalism in the area of print, photo, television and radio, was launched by Communications Minister Faith Muthambi on Thursday evening in Pretoria.

Muthambi said the time has come for African journalists to tell African stories to the world, adding that having journalists who understand the development imperatives is key in the region's ultimate socio-economic development.

The Minister said while other journalists are only interested in covering stories about famine, diseases, corruption in the region, she said there are so many untold stories of success.

"All we are urging for us is that Africa must begin to tell the good story and not allow a narrative of negativity to persist and override all that the world gets to know about us.

"It is easy to find good news in the continent, there is a good story to tell about Africa's newest state, South Sudan, the diversity in the Nigerian economy," she said.

Muthambi said negative stories about the continent scare away investors as some of such stories are aimed at creating an impression of a continent not open for business as it is always hit by crises.

However, she said the awards assess those who are able to paint a true picture and not only an easy half-baked story of things falling apart.

Freedom of Expression

The Minister also used the platform to express her happiness about SADC's policy pronouncement that journalists must be given the space to do their work and contribute to public dialogue.

"We condemn uttering the targeting of journalists for harassment and terrorism, we call on countries in the SADC region and beyond to release all journalists in detention and create an atmosphere of cooperation between the fourth estate and the governments.

"This hardly means that we will always see eye to eye, but the cardinal principal must remain, we must defend each other's rights to hold different views.

"When this principle is not respected, democracy starts to erode; there is no excuse of deviating from that principle, no matter how offended we could feel," she said.

Muthambi said the media industry like any other sectors of society also has a role to re-build the country's ravaged years of colonialism.

"Journalists, who often correctly question others in society about their commitment to change, seldom focus on the role of media houses and their employers about the change they want to see in others," she said.

National Adjudicating Committee (NAC) chairperson Nomonde Gongxeka announced that a fundraising strategy that will see the monetary prize increasing is about to be finalised.

Gongxeka also touched on the challenges they faced in the recent years regarding the type of entries they received.

Challenges

"I can never over emphasise how important it is for participants to fully comprehend all the processes of the competition rules before they submit their stories. Good stories are often disqualified simply because the entries did not adhere to the rules of the competition. Again, it is also important for a participant to understand what constitutes a cross-border SADC story," she said.

The NAC was able to increase the number of entries from 11 entries in 2013 to 37 entries last year. According to NAC chairperson, entries will be closing in March 2015.

Veteran journalist who is now a media trainer at the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ), Michael Schmidt, said: "For the past 12 years, the IAJ has been focusing on regional [SADC] integration; we've run a series of courses based on this.

"Our commitment is that the winners of the SADC media awards will be automatic placements in our next SADC Heads of State and government workshop which is both a workshop on SADC issues, but also working newsroom at the Summit.

"The workshop will take place at the IAJ in Johannesburg in August later this year and immediately after the training we will go to the SADC Heads of State Summit, but I'm not sure where it is going to be held this year," he said.

The SADC Media Awards competition was established following a decision by the Council of Ministers in 1996 to establish a sector that deals with matters that relate to, amongst others, information, sport and culture.

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