

SA, Lesotho agree to cooperate on frequency interference

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MASERU: Communications Minister Faith Muthambi has signed an agreement of cooperation regarding cross border frequency interference for Digital Terrestrial Television services with her Lesotho counterpart, Communications, Science and Technology Minister Khotso Letsatsi.



The signing took place in Thaba Bosiu, Lesotho on Wednesday.

Speaking to SAnews after the signing ceremony, the Minister said Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) was a cohesive force to revolutionise television in the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

"We are on the journey of digital migration implementation together and I believe the process will assist us realising other social, political and economic benefits of strategic importance for our respective countries," she said.

The Kingdom of Lesotho is the second neighbouring country South Africa has engaged with since Cabinet approved the Broadcasting Digital Migration Policy in March earlier this year.

Last week, Minister Muthambi met Botswana's Transport and Communications Minister Tshenolo Mabeo, where the two agreed to cooperate in mitigating cross border radio frequency spectrum interference.

"These bilateral engagements are leading the region... and continue to form part of the history of our country. Lesotho is the same situation with us, although they have initiated a public awareness campaign, they are facing challenges with the DTT receiver's acquisition," she said.

Speaking to reporters after signing the agreement, Minister Letsatsi said: "This is the most remarkable achievement of my 100 days in office. I was always worried about frequency interference, especially in our borders as the deadline to migrate from analogue to digital migration is around the corner.

"As Lesotho, we believe that this cooperation will see our residents in our borders protected from frequency interference. We believe that this agreement will make our digital migration programme easy to implement as we will be learning more from our neighbours."

The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) deadline to migrate to digital broadcasting is fast approaching, however South Africa is not expected to meet it.



Minister Muthambi said in the Department of Communications Budget Vote, that the country will not meet the 17 June 2015 analogue switch off date as set by the ITU.

"We are ready to consult with Cabinet on the digital signal switch-on date. We will do all we can to ensure that the migration process commences during the second quarter of this financial year. We therefore, make a call to all stakeholders to work together with us to realise this objective," she said at the time.

The consequence for countries who will not migrate from analogue signal by June 2015 is that they will not be protected against interference.

Therefore the two Ministers on Wednesday agreed to cooperate in mitigating cross border frequency interference that may occur as a result of international protection of analogue frequencies coming to an end.

They also agreed to establish a joint task team to facilitate the engagements between their respective countries; enhance collaboration and cooperation of the regulators in addressing matters of mutual interest on cross border frequency interference on terrestrial services; sharing of plans with regard to the roadmap for the release and use of digital dividend for other services as and when may be necessary.

The two also agreed to share technical implementation best practice; engagement on the areas of cooperation in content development and information dissemination to facilitate social cohesion integration and further engagement towards the development and implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

The Minister is expected to also visit Swaziland on 3 June before going to Namibia, Mozambique and Zimbabwe for bilateral talks on the same issue.

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