

SAGA REPORT ON ANNOUNCEMENT BY MINISTER OF SPORTS, ARTS AND CULTURE – 25 MARCH 2020

The measures proposed in the minister's statement are based on the announcement by the president on 15 March 2020 which declared a National State of Disaster. The announcement of 15 March restricted public and private gatherings to less than 100 people and Min. Mthethwa describes this necessary measure as being a 'fatal blow' to the sector.

Unfortunately, not all the proposals contained in the minister's statement account for the further development and subsequent announcement by the president on Mon 23 March 2020 which declared a national shutdown as of midnight, Thurs 26 March.

Minister Mthethwa indicates that subsequent to the president's initial announcement on 15 March, his department convened a number of sectoral meetings in order to discuss suggestions on how to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. It is apparent that the minister chose only to engage with CCIFSA as a representative of the Film/TV and theatre production sector.

Perhaps the minister needs to be reminded that the sector, comprising individual practitioners and duly constituted organisations and federations have openly and repeatedly rejected CCIFSA as a legitimate representative of the sector. Indeed, the minister was present when Commission 2 of the National Film Summit delivered its report on Tues 5 February 2019, with clear and unambiguous recommendations that CCIFSA be disbanded and that the taxpayer money used to prop it up instead be directed to projects that benefit creative artists, and not to support the personal ambitions of hand-picked apprentice politicians. Suffice to say, CCIFSA does not carry a mandate from the entire film/TV and theatre production sector. While we do not begrudge the minister his right to confer with whomsoever he pleases, SAGA strongly objects to the selective manner in which he engages the sector and its representatives.

Indeed, his stated figures for the number of film, TV and theatre productions impacted by the National State of Disaster are alarmingly inaccurate. Had he chosen instead to engage more broadly within the sector, his figures would have

been far more reflective of the actual economic impact and perhaps his proposals may have been far more targeted.

Some of the commitments announced by the minister include:

- 1. Making playhouse theatre spaces available for artists to continue to perform and for those performances to be streamed live.** This proposal is clearly not intended for a national shutdown and it remains unclear when this project will take effect. Most importantly, it does not indicate how this model will benefit actors financially. Who pays the actor for their performance? Accessing content on-line is not the challenge under the National State of Disaster, the challenge lies in offering financial support to the actor as compensation for lost earnings. This proposal stated as is, does not meet this challenge.
- 2. Appealing to the financial services sector for relief from debit order payments on home loans, car finance and property rentals.** The DSAC offers no explanation or plan for how this might be achieved. This proposal demands further interrogation. Will the minister follow this up, with which institutions, based on what data? Who can apply for this relief, based on what criteria? Does this proposal include account repayments at clothing/grocery stores? There is no indication as to when the minister will follow this up or report back to industry.
- 3. That the Dept of Communications should make platforms available for 'key individuals' to deliver positive messages of hope and for the purposes of educational awareness on the Corona Virus in a campaign entitled #OneMessageManyVoices. The DSAC will commission 'young and upcoming artists, renowned artists, and our legends to curate via their respective social media platforms'.** As much as positive messages of hope are sorely needed, there is no explanation as to which platforms will be made available by the Dept of Communications. In addition, how will these platforms be integrated with the artist's own social media platforms? In this instance, the DSAC commits to commissioning artists to deliver these messages but there is no indication as to the criteria by which these artists will be selected or how much they will be paid per message. How much will the DSAC make available for this project overall,

and when will it start? Who are the 'legends' and how are they identified? Does this project discriminate against artists who choose not to engage on social media but who are negatively impacted by the loss of income?

- 4. To ensure that the Public Broadcaster is biased in favour of local content to alleviate the plight of artists and athletes.** It remains unclear how presenting local content on the SABC will benefit *athletes*. Does 'local content' include TV and film productions? Are actors included in the definition of 'artists' in this context? If the plight of actors are indeed a priority, SAGA reminds the minister that actors' earnings remain deeply prejudiced in the absence of any statutory right to earn a residual income in the form of royalties. The minister may remember that he co-chaired a multi-lateral meeting of government and industry organisations on 15 April 2019 in which CCIFSA recorded its opposition to the Bills that enable actors a right to earn royalties.
- 5. Working with the Dept of Communications to ensure that cast and crew of 'over 25' TV productions and 'about 15' live shows which were postponed or cancelled, must be paid by the producers of those productions.** It is alarming that the DSAC is unable to indicate the precise number of TV productions and live shows that are impacted. These figures are available and we have posted on SAGA's website a comprehensive list of film, TV, theatre, live event and commercial productions that have been affected. How will producers make payment to cast and crew? How will cast and crew of the live shows benefit from this compensation, given that they are included in the proposal under the 'audiovisual sector'?
- 6. Reprioritising its budget allocation to make available R150 million to support practitioners in the sector. The minister indicates that the department will prioritise artists and practitioners who were already booked to perform in events funded by the department, but which were subsequently cancelled or postponed. Further, the department will offer support to legends of the industry.** It remains unclear how the DSAC will 'support' practitioners. Is there a formula that apportions to them a share of R150 million? Are actors considered 'artists or practitioners'? Will the DSAC 'support practitioners' who were booked for productions that were *not* funded by the DSAC even if they have suffered a loss of earnings? Again, who are the 'legends of the industry' and on what criteria

are they considered such? Is there a reason to discriminate against hard-working actors who are not considered 'legends'?

- 7. Commissioning service providers in the digital space to curate new programs in all disciplines to ensure that artists continue to work. The Dept will share its detailed plans for the process of participation.** It is unclear what this means. Who are 'service providers in the digital space'? What is the 'digital space'? When will the DSAC share its detailed plans?

- 8. NFVF will provide a cash injection of R500 000 to the nine companies currently commissioned by the organisation. This relief will only be contained to the slates currently commissioned by the institution, and would be extended it to anyone else in the industry (sic).** This statement is self-contradictory and makes no sense at all.

This is indeed a time of uncertainty and grave concern for our future as an industry, and as a nation. No one knows what tomorrow holds and there is no precedent by which South Africans can project a result in our fight against COVID-19. We all face this challenge together and we are all called upon to do the best we can with what we have. We look to our leaders to help shape and execute a strategy towards a desired outcome. In such instances, clear communication is essential.

Whereas the industry greeted with great anticipation news that the minister would brief us on 25 March 2020 with his plans to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on our freelance-based sector, what the minister actually presented live on national TV fell far short of our expectations. The statement issued by the DSAC is deeply disappointing in its lack of clarity, its contradictions, ambiguities, grammatical errors, repetitions and the fact that it raises far more questions than it answers. SAGA demands from the DSAC a greater degree of care and responsibility in the formulation of its vision and in the articulation of its strategies.

The minister must surely reconsider his approach to industry consultation, especially at this time. He needs to be thoroughly briefed on reliable data gathered by legitimate organisations and recognised institutions. He must apply a discerning mind to the scope and efficacy of his interventions and he needs to

be supported by able office bearers who have a firm grasp of the sector and its inner workings.

We appeal to the minister to review the statement produced by his office and revise its contents in a manner that offers the strategic direction and purposeful, detailed contents the sector so desperately needs.

SAGA CHAIRMAN – 27 March 2020