



JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT BY THE MINISTERS OF TRANSPORT AND PUBLIC ENTERPRISES

INDEPENDENT NEWS MEDIA: "THE FAKE NEWS FACTORY"

27 May 2022

PRETORIA – The Ministries of Transport and Public Enterprises wish to dismiss the falsehoods and fake news peddled by the owners, editors and ‘journalists’ of the Independent Newspapers group, who are determined to advance anti-democratic political objectives in and outside of Government, by regularly misleading the public with disinformation.

For the past three days, various titles of the Independent group have published a series of patently false front-page stories regarding Ministers Fikile Mbalula and Pravin Gordhan.

With dishonest speculation and malicious conjecture these headlines – “*Fikile Mbalula, Pravin Gordhan allegedly fell out over R17 billion Sanral contracts*” and “*Fikile Mbalula allegedly accuses Pravin Gordhan of trying to cause rift...*” – make accusations, with no factual basis, that Minister Gordhan has improper, corrupt relationships with service providers of the South African National Roads Agency (SANRAL), that “Gordhan interfered” in SANRAL tenders to benefit a private company and that there is disunity and divisions in Cabinet.

These events, which according to the group’s newspapers, are based on the mythical accounts of anonymous “Sanral and government sources”, apparently occurred at a Cabinet meeting on 18 May 2021, where, the public is told, the two Ministers “fell out” about SANRAL contracts.

This is patently false: First, Minister Gordhan did not attend the Cabinet meeting because of other responsibilities. Second, Minister Gordhan has no business or personal interest in, or with any company that does

business with SANRAL. Third, he has no authority at all over SANRAL or its procurement processes – the entity reports to Minister Mbalula.

This joint statement demonstrates clearly that there is mutual respect and collegiality between the two Ministers as cabinet colleagues. Both serve in Cabinet at the pleasure of the President, and both are unequivocally committed to carrying out their mandated duties, with professionalism and in the interest of the country.

Both Ministers are seeking legal advice on how to protect their rights and how to take action against a persistent, malicious, disinformation campaign conducted by Independent Media. It is important for the public to be reminded that Independent Media are deliberately not members of the South African National Editors' Forum, nor the South Africa Press Council and do not fall under the purview of the Press Ombudsman. In that sense, this has clearly become a 'rogue' element in the South African media industry. Is it no wonder that we have now been witnessing this devastating decline in (even the absence of) journalistic ethics, and standards of news reporting?

Of greater concern to the Ministers, however, is the damage these newspapers cause daily to our democracy by misleading the public with false narratives and fake, manufactured 'news'. This cannot be allowed or accepted: there must be consequences for their conduct.

We have entered a dangerous period in our democracy when once a reputable and influential newspaper group, which ought to hold elected officials to account (with facts and indisputable evidence gathered from diligent investigations), has descended into a totally discredited 'news factory'. This is bad for the country and the media industry that plays such a vital role in our democracy by informing the public.

The call to the rest of the South African media fraternity is to be cautious and vigilant when placing reliance on news headlines produced by Independent Media. Similarly, the public must be reminded of the group's audacious 'expose' in 2021, when they reported to the world, without evidence, that a mother of Tembisa gave birth to 10 babies at the Steve Biko Academic Hospital in Pretoria.

Lest we forget: South Africa and the world are still waiting to see the decuplets!

This newspaper group was bought with the pension money of public servants and it is a total irony that the government, which contributes a substantial amount to the pension contribution of public servants, is under consistent constant attack from Independent Media.

Ministers Mbalula and Gordhan are totally committed to their respective responsibilities and will take every opportunity to expose state capture, corruption and theft, and those who wish to disrupt government and the ruling party.

ENDS.