

**SPEAKING NOTES**  
**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**  
**12 JULY 2024**

**KLN Sangoni ANC (MP)**

**Chairperson of Portfolio Committee on Communications and Digital Technologies**

**Budget Vote Debate: Budget Vote 4 (GCIS)**

**[8 MINUTES]**

Minister in the Presidency, Honourable Khumbudzo Ntshavheni

Deputy Ministers, the Honourable Morolong and Honourable Mhlauli

Honourable Members of the Portfolio Committee on Communications & Digital Technologies

Leadership of the GCIS, led by the Acting Director-General Ms Nomonde Mnukwa

Fellow South Africans

Access to information is a fundamental right enshrined in section 32 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. The obligation imposed by that right is a government communication system that is an agile, dynamic and ideologically grounded; alive to the fact that it does not wage the struggle for an informed, educated and empowered citizenry in conditions of its own choosing.

The public sphere is a heavily contested space with a plurality of voices, all competing for the hearts and minds of the people in an environment of fast diminishing attention spans. Ours is an ideological struggle, what the African National Congress calls the Battle of Ideas. Each actor in this theatre of public opinion is neither an innocent conveyor of news nor devoid of subjective interest.

This year, for example, marks thirty years since our democratic breakthrough. That is three decades of progress. Three decades of material conditions uplifted, opportunities created and lives transformed. Houses built, basic services extended, and access to quality education and healthcare. These are the achievements of successive democratic administrations led by the African National Congress.

The ANC has been at the forefront of three decades of transformation, the pursuit of freedom and equality, and the achievement of social justice. This progress is tangible and measurable, as outlined in the 30-Year Review Report, and reflected in the results of Census 2022.

And yet on the pages of our newspapers, on our television screens, on our airwaves, and online – you would be hard pressed to find these achievements reported on factually and impartially. Who can forget the relentless onslaught against the African National Congress and by extension the government it leads in the run-up to this year's general election; despite the many recorded successes over the last 30 years. It is not conceivable that any of us in this house would deny that public and social media platforms are weaponised and used, on a daily basis, to cancel and cyberbully those who genuinely believe in the transformative policies and evidence based delivery of the ANC-led government.

But nonetheless, a free and vibrant press is one of democracy's greatest achievements, as is the dynamic civil society we have nurtured over the past thirty years. In democratic South Africa, every citizen enjoys the right and freedom to receive or impart information or ideas

So Indeed in this space we are most content with Mao Zedong's words: "Let a hundred flowers bloom, and a hundred schools of thought contend." As the democratic state we do not expect slavish reportage, praise-singing or propaganda. What we do have a legitimate expectation of is that our work is communicated faithfully, accurately and impartially.

That is why the Government Communication and Information System is so vital. To ensure that citizens receive information that is relevant, timely and easily accessible to help them better their lives. Government communicators must report on the story of opportunity and progress to the South African people, confront the challenges and tell them our people what we are doing to advance social justice. And justice, as the saying goes, must not only be done, but also be *seen to be done*.

This is not to say that ours is to expect government to be partisan but rather that public servants exercise their work conscientiously and in line with section 197 of the Constitution, which enjoins the public service to loyally execute the lawful policies of the government of the day.

As the ANC we welcome the commitments made in this Budget Vote. They are a clear commitment to ensure that communication remains front of center of the work of government, and it shall remain connected to the people whose interests we are mandated to serve.

In navigating the challenging times occasioned by a new configuration of government, the GCIS has identified the need to inform citizens about the strategic priorities, plans and work of the Government of National Unity. The Government of National Unity will rely heavily on this Department to communicate unambiguously about its strategic objectives, spending priorities and delivery without either claiming victories or disassociating itself from setbacks as individual political parties

Government communications is the corner stone of a vibrant democracy. It bridges the gap between government and the public, ensuring that citizens are well informed about policies, initiatives and the progress of our nation. This proposed budget for the GCIS should not therefore not be merely a financial tool but rather a conscious investment in our democracy.

It is deeply concerning House Chair, that once again, the Portfolio Committee must lament the wholly insufficient funds for the GCIS. This continuous reductions of their budget in real terms are akin with arming government with knives and knobkerries to fight against those armed with combat attillery and ballistic missiles.

It cannot be, that the strategic communications function in this government continues to be underresourced. Advertising and marketing budgets routinely bear the harshest brunt of budget cuts as part of cost containment measures. Communications is severely underfunded across all three spheres of government with a resultant knock on effect in the economy, evidenced by the

crippling challenges in the media industry which is heavily reliant to advertising revenue for their profitability.

Equally, the reduction of the budget set-asides on designated groups from 30 per cent to 25 per cent is an area that the committee has noted as a concern, as this impacts the transformative measures the department has put in place to ensure meaningful economic participation of designated groups.

House Chair, the communications and media landscape is dynamic and evolving.

When the GCIS was launched in 1998 it was the age of newspapers, radio and the eight o'clock news. This is the age of TikTok, YouTube and Snapchat. The age of OpenAI, Gemini and Claude 3.5. The age of Midjourney, Sora and other generative AI tools. The GCIS strives to retain its position as an accurate and credible source of information in the era of deepfakes, face-tunes, fake news, manipulated content and disinformation - where voices, people and entire locations can be cloned and altered. This has serious implications for all facets of government communications, and we have to adapt accordingly.

Audiences have rapidly evolved. Gen Z has been overtaken by Generation Alpha, the first fully digital native generation in the history of humankind.

For the GCIS to succeed in delivering on its mandate, it has to push frontiers, innovate and move with the times. Government communicators MUST develop a deep sense of understanding and appreciation of the environment in which they operate and the different target audiences they serve.

It is for this reason that we welcome the Department's focused attention on regularly conducting skills audits and equipping their workforce with skills of this modern age. It simply cannot be business as usual. This necessitates that the GCIS is innovative, agile and adaptable, and that it does not swerve from its clear ideological outlook and orientation, namely to communicate the work of the government of the day.

Finally House Chair, while we justly expect the MDDA to ensure media diversity, focusing particularly on community media, the discussion on the transformation of the mainstream media industry as a whole seems to have been relegated to the dustbin of history. Transformation not just in form but also in content.

We welcome and support work towards the transformation of Marketing, Advertising and Communications (MAC) sector. Players in this industry yield significant power in shaping narratives about society, its values and how we view ourselves. We also applaud the GCIS' commitment to finalising the Draft Print and Digital Media Transformation and Revitalisation Charter by the end of the financial year.

House Chair, I commend the GCIS for their dedication and hard work over the years in ensuring that government's communication strategies are inclusive, transparent, and effective.

As Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee in the seventh Parliament, I pledge that this Committee will maintain constructive and robust oversight over the Department and its entities, and ensure an impactful and systematic approach to service delivery, in order to achieve a better life for all South Africans.

I call on all members of this House to endorse this budget. Together, we can push the frontiers of communication in the modern age.