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Press Statement

Veteran Eastern Cape Community Media Publisher Faces Threats and Intimidation over Investigative Reporting

18 November 2024

The Association of Independent Publishers is deeply concerned about the threats and intimidation being faced by one of our veteran publishers in the Eastern Cape, Andile Nomabhunga. Nomabhunga is the publisher of *The Informer*, a newspaper based in Matatiele. He has been running this publication for the past 27 years, with 10 of those years spent operating from Matatiele after relocating from Kokstad.

In September 2024, his work was disrupted after he received multiple threats related to the stories he was covering. On 25 September, a 34-year-old man was shot and killed in broad daylight in the Matatiele CBD. Nomabhunga quickly responded and covered the story, broadcasting it live on *The Informer's* YouTube and Facebook channels. Police confirmed that the killing was part of an ongoing drug war in Matatiele, marking the eighth death in a series of killings. Two suspects were arrested and *The Informer* covered their first appearance in court. However, shortly after this, the publication received a threatening message via their inbox, written in Xhosa, warning them to “stop writing about the drugs, otherwise we will deal with you.”

A second threat then came on 12 October. Nomabhunga was in his office when he received a call from an unknown number, which turned out to be an 079 number. A male voice on the other end confirmed Nomabhunga's identity and then demanded that he stop reporting on municipal news, claiming that his coverage was disturbing certain people. Nomabhunga asked the person to identify himself but he refused. He then mentioned the mayor and accused Nomabhunga of hindering the mayor's work. This threat followed *The Informer's* inquiries into municipal activities.

A further incident then occurred during an interview with a woman accused of fraud and witchcraft by her husband. While Nomabhunga was giving her an opportunity to respond, she suddenly lunged at his camera, breaking it. Nomabhunga went to the police station to report the damage, but she then filed a counter-claim, accusing him of assaulting her and forcing her to comment. As a result the police then came to arrest him, and he was forced to appear in court for assault charges. The case has been postponed to January 2025.

ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT PUBLISHERS

Directors:

A Mangxaba (Chair), D Ntsanwisi, S Mboleka, T Mjiba, S Khanyile, J Makgate (Deputy Chair), M Dlakude, E Phiri,
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In addition to these threats, there has been increasing interference with *The Informer's* ability to cover court proceedings. It seems there is a coordinated effort among lawyers, magistrates, and prosecutors to prevent *The Informer* from reporting on cases of public interest. In many instances, once a journalist enters the courtroom, lawyers immediately alert the magistrate, and the publication is asked to leave or told not to report on the case. Despite Nomabhunga's repeated complaints, this practice continues.

The ongoing threats and intimidation have taken a toll on *The Informer's* staff, particularly on their young journalists. Nomabhunga states, "It has become extremely difficult for my journalists to pursue stories freely, without fear of repercussions. I believe a public condemnation of these actions from organisations such as AIP and the South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef) would be instrumental in ensuring that the perpetrators respect our work as journalists and stop hindering our efforts to report on matters of public interest." Nomabhunga adds, "I hope my speaking out will bring attention to the challenges we are facing and help create a safer environment for my journalists to do their work without fear".

Reggy Moalusi, Sanef executive director, states, "Sanef condemns these acts of harassment being directed at Nomabhunga. He must remain brave and resolute and continue to expose the rot, without fear or favour. We hope law enforcement agencies will decisively act, and protect him, and importantly, allow him to do his journalistic work freely".

"We are very concerned, as the treatment of Mr Nomabhungu fits a pattern of local authorities harassing and persecuting local journalists, often away from the public eye. Our society depends on community journalists being able to do their valuable work free from such interference," Anton Harber of the Campaign for Free Expression (CFE) said. CFE is looking into assisting Mr Nomabhungu to defend himself in court and to explore the possibility of further action to protect him.

ENDS/

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Note to Editors:

The Association of Independent Publishers (AIP) is a vibrant national organisation for advancing the interests of the local grassroots independent print and online media sector in South Africa.

Website: www.aip.org.za

X (Twitter) - <https://twitter.com/AIPSouthAfrica>

Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/IndependentPublishers/>

LinkedIn - <https://www.linkedin.com/company/90829107/admin/feed/posts/>

YouTube - <https://www.youtube.com/@AIPSouthAfrica>

Frequently asked question:

Why is community media so critical?

- It is one of the most diverse sectors of the media in terms of language, content and format.
- It covers areas of the country that no other media cover, other than SABC radio.
- It has the closest and most intimate relationship with its audiences.
- It builds communities from the bottom up.
- It holds local power brokers (government, business and civil society organisations) to account.
- It is critical to SA democracy because it ensures that we know what is happening in our country – not just what is happening in the major cities.
- It celebrates and preserves our local culture and history.

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