



# SEYCHELLES BROADCASTING CORPORATION

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## Press Release

### **SBC reaffirms its impartiality in the face of criticisms**

The SBC has reiterated that it is committed to remain impartial in its coverages and giving equitable access to all sides as affirmed in its recently published Editorial Guidelines, not only during the election period but all year round.

The SBC's reaction comes after recent complaints from the two main Political Parties and, also, social media attacks questioning the Corporation's impartiality and independence mostly in regard to political coverages in the news.

The SBC says that the criticisms come from both sides of the political divide; with the Opposition asserting that the Corporation covers too much of the President and other government officials while the Ruling Party believes that the SBC should be covering all of the President's undertakings as the current Head of State.

Some of the criticisms being levelled at the National Broadcaster are that:

*a. It is being manipulated by the main Opposition party*

The SBC is governed by a Board of Directors and has a Management team as well as an Editorial Committee which takes editorial decisions. It is a slur on all of these instances of internal oversight that, somehow, the Corporation is systematically biased or being manipulated. All of these instances take the SBC's independence very seriously and will repudiate any external interference.

*b. The CEO is regularly in the newsroom to censor reports*

With News being the flagship programme of the SBC, and the section that is scrutinised the most by the public, it is normal for both the CEO and DCEO as part of their work of oversight to be in the newsroom on a regular basis.

The CEO's presence and that of the DCEO in the Newsroom from time to time also serves to demonstrate interest in the work of the Newsroom, and support for the news team in their difficult task of ensuring balanced and objective reporting on a daily basis.

*c. It is giving extensive coverage and undue advantage to the incumbent President during an electioneering period.*

The Chief Executive Officer of the SBC, Mr Bérard Duprès has explained that there is no legal provision within the Elections Act which prevents the Broadcaster from continuing to cover the statements and visits by the President and ministers. [If there was, it would constitute an infringement on the Corporation's mandate under the SBC Act to inform the public. SBC is simply reporting the events in the country to ensure that the public continues to remain aware of what is occurring in the country.]



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Notwithstanding the above, Mr Duprès says that the SBC is also committed to ensuring that it performs its mandates in line with all the journalistic principles, which includes fair, balanced and objective reporting of news.

Under that context, the SBC's Editorial Guidelines states the following with regards to coverage of incumbent candidates:

*"In an election campaign there is a risk of incumbents trying to use their position to advance their re-election prospects.*

*Coverage of government business during elections periods shall be scrutinised to ensure that incumbents do not have unwarranted advantage over their opponents.*

*The SBC shall regard with caution any statement or action by an official of an incumbent party and will check whether, for example, public appearances of government officials are strictly on government business or part of their election campaign."*

"The SBC is mindful of the above and will continue to ensure that we provide fair coverage to the incumbent and the government, whilst also ensuring access to the national broadcaster for other politicians, political parties and groupings." says Mr Duprès.

This is all the more pertinent under the current circumstances, where the other arm of Government, the Legislature, stands dissolved, and consequently it is the duty of the National Broadcaster to enable access to their perspectives on the ongoing national discourses.

SBC has explained that the country's legislation fixed the period of 90 days as electioneering period even though the nomination date for registering a candidate is less than 90 days from the election date.

Consequently, whilst it is correct to state that a candidate in an election becomes a candidate when the person is officially registered, it is prudent to treat a person who has publicly expressed his intention to stand for election as a candidate 90 days before the election date.

The SBC is ensuring this prudence with respect to all candidates, the President included.

The SBC will, therefore:

- Continue to cover the government of the day as part its service public duty to inform the public.
- Continue to provide coverage of politicians, as part of its duty to ensure 'divergent views'

The SBC is already making use of approaches to ensure a diversity of voices: the opinions of the government or the majority party need to be counterbalanced by opposing, independent and alternative views; coverage of public events or statements made by the ruling party on issues of public interest should be counterbalanced by coverage of the views of the opposition, independent experts and others. Viewers and listeners have seen this, for example, in connection with the topical issue of housing loans and the methadone programme.



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The SBC has also taken the decision to put on hold programmes that it receives from MDAs (Ministries, Departments and Agencies) under its Policy for Airtime for Public Entities. These broadcasts will be considered after the elections.

### Complaints Process

The SBC recognises that, even with its strong commitment to the journalistic principles as undertaken through its Editorial Guidelines, there might be instances where an individual, a candidate, a political party or a group might feel aggrieved with a particular coverage by the SBC.

In such instances, the aggrieved individual or group should make use of the SBC's complaints process to lodge a written complaint. The Complaints procedure is explained in the SBC's Editorial Guidelines, which can be found on the SBC's website: <https://sbc.sc/public-documents/>

All formal complaints received are acknowledged and investigated before a response is provided to the complainant and the issues raised are redressed, if warranted.

The SBC has formally investigated a total of 30 complaints since the start of 2020. Of these, 10 are related to political coverage in the news: 4 relates to perceived bias against the ruling party and 6 relates to perceived bias against the opposition party.

**The SBC concludes by reassuring all political stakeholders and the public that the Corporation remains committed to performing its mandate, as provided for by the laws of the country, impartially, independently and in the public interest during the election period and beyond.**