

ADDRESS BY CHAIRPERSON OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB: NEWSMAKER OF THE YEAR EVENT

FRIDAY 23 MARCH 2012

PART ONE

Thank you Leanne.

Public Protector, Advocate Thuli Madonsela and officials from her office, ANC Youth League President Julius Malema, members of the diplomatic corp, North West University Vice-Chancellor, Dr Theuns Eloff, CEO of AON South African, Anton Roux, Proudly South African CEO Leslie Sedibe, distinguished guests, colleagues...

On behalf of the executive of the National Press Club, I wish to extend a very warm welcome to each and every one of you for joining us this evening.

This event, the NPC/AON SA NEWSMAKER OF THE YEAR banquet is the highlight on our calendar. We also award outstanding journalism and communication.

I have been asked to officially welcome you. WELCOME!

Amongst us this evening is CEOs and executives from several media organisations, editors, journalists, academics, the business fraternity and members of civil society. Thank you for honouring us with your presence and thank you for supporting the National Press Club.

I will address you about the role of the media and about our Newsmakers of the Year 2011 a little later on. The National Press Club in partnership with Proudly South African decided to introduce an additional category to awards, which we traditionally present.

We have agreed that it is important that we recognise and award media organisations or individuals within our industry that pride themselves on making a difference.

Corporate social investment is a non-negotiable. Let me congratulate the various media houses for their many initiatives that they are driving. These include areas around community development, education, job creation, elevating poverty and sport. Philanthropy and making a positive change should be non-negotiable.

These initiatives show that the media organisations of today are not only bystanders, but active participants in creating a better South Africa.

We would have loved to have awarded each and every campaign, but we have singled out one or two.

I now call on my good friend, Advocate Leslie Sedibe, from Proudly South African to please join me on stage and to announce the winners of the inaugural National Press Club "Proudly South African" Award.

[Leslie announces winners and we jointly present the awards]

PART 2

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentleman... For many years we have rewarded and awarded outstanding journalism. This evening is no exception.

I am pleased to announce that in the over 32-year long history of the press club, we have had a record number of entries for the various categories.

It's almost 150. It is encouraging to see that the quality continues to improve.

Let me in advance congratulate the various winners. Keep the flag of journalism flying high. The executive of the press club extends its appreciation to the esteemed panel of independent judges who adjudicated the various categories. Thank you for your time.

As with any awards, you are going to have those who are happy and those who are disappointed. Unfortunately everyone cannot win, but for me you are all winners in your own right.

The North-West University has partnered with the National Press Club on these awards. Dr Eloff: to you and your team, thank you very much once again. I know you will be on board again next year.

You are a shining example Doctor of academic excellence and of great leadership. The honour is yours to join me on stage and to announce the various category winners.

[Dr Theuns Eloff announces the winners and jointly presents the awards with Yusuf]

PART 3

Our newsmakers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentleman... and now for the highlight of our evening.

Before I come to the newsmakers of the year, I need to first reflect on the role of the National Press Club and some of our highlights for 2011, the role of the media and the challenges facing us.

Last year we experienced a number of highs and lows, symptomatic of what we believe to be a vibrant news year.

It was Charles Dickens who wrote in a *Tale of Two Cities*: *"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us..."*

The reality is: we had good journalism, we had bad journalism. We heard voices of reason and we suffered the voices of dissent. It was a year marked by moves to silence us, but also a year that we united to say "we won't be silenced". It was a year that we cried for freedom of expression, free speech and media freedom. It was a year when our detractors threatened us.

Ladies and gentleman... Let me repeat what I said to the National Council of Provinces in Mamelodi just a few weeks ago:

We will not sit back and watch our Constitutional rights being taken away from us. We will fight to the bitter end. If the Protection of Information Bill becomes law in its current form, we will go to the Constitutional Court.

The National Press Club declared Black Tuesday late last year. It was the day when the National Assembly voted in favour of what some call the "secrecy laws". We wish to say thank you to the nation for standing up and supporting the Black Tuesday initiative.

Not only did the media unite, but civil society also. Hundreds of NGOs, leading academics, politicians past and present, corporate South Africa and many throughout the world has spoken out against the bill. We will continue to raise our voices.

Freedom of speech and freedom of expression is key to a free media. Any move to silence us will be opposed at every turn. There is no way that we can go back to the dark days of Apartheid when censorship, banning orders and the arrest of editors and journalists was the modus operandi of the government of that time.

The press club hosted the inaugural Percy Qubuzo Memorial Lecture at Unisa to commemorate Black Wednesday. Let me repeat what I said outside parliament, addressing a Right2Know "Black Tuesday" campaign: If government are going to forge ahead with the POIB, we will have Black Monday, Black Tuesday, Black Wednesday, Black Thursday, Black Friday, Black Saturday, Black Sunday. The fight continues.

We don't need a media tribunal. We are able and capable of regulating ourselves. A government appointed tribunal will be an insult to our democracy and our constitution. While the Press Ombudsman system has shortcomings and urgently need to be strengthened, we continue to demand self-regulation.

But let me remind my colleagues. Pride yourself on balanced, fair, accurate and independent journalism.

I also support the idea of creating a culture of "campaign journalists." While we inform and educate, we have to become active and make a difference where we can. The public editor of the Sunday Times argued his case well recently. Let's use our muscle to effect positive change.

Distinguished guests, I don't have enough time to highlight the many achievements of the National Press Club, which I have had the honour to chair for a number of years over two terms.

We regularly host newsmakers, we have monthly networking get-togethers, we have taken the stand on media issues and recently we opened the Embargo at the Court Classique Hotel.

We will continue to grow this press club. Our membership is now close on to 500 from the media and communications fraternity.

Let me thank my vice-chairman Jos Charle, our General Manager Ben Rootman, Tanya De Vente our PRO, our secretariat headed by Martin van Niekerk and the entire executive team. (ad lib)

Your hard work and all your efforts cannot go unnoticed. Let me also. I wish the new executive, which will be elected next week all the success. Please ensure that you keep the flag of this press club flying high.

To our many sponsors, thank you for promoting and supporting media freedom. To Aon South Africa and in particular to Anton Roux, the CEO and his team... we value our partnership and I will confess that I do support Manchester United.

Distinguished guests...now on to the National Press Club / AON "Newsmaker of the Year 2011":

Last year, Madonsela and Malema got our tongues wagging. They got us talking, writing and debating. Some may say it was for the wrong reasons and others for the right reasons.

However, both the Public Protector of the Republic of South Africa and the President of the ANC Youth League made headlines day in and day out. They dominated the pages of our newspapers and the airwaves. They took up

thousands of centimeter column space in our newspapers and hours and hours of airtime on radio and television. The social media was constantly abuzz with the two of them. In our offices and in our homes, they got us talking.

Advocate Thuli Madonsela and Julius Malema or “Juju” as he has been dubbed in the media is undoubtedly the Newsmakers of 2011.

The National Press Club hosted several briefings with both of them. Advocate Madonsela is increasingly been seen as the guardian and the protector of our rights. She made several important decisions over the year. It was because of her findings that two cabinet ministers were fired and the national commissioner of the police was suspended.

Her probe in to the leasing of two police buildings made the front pages and continues to do so.

Like him or loathe him, Julius Malema has held the media transfixed in the last year. Whether he was talking about Botswana, nationalization or defending controversial struggle songs – the public and media listened.

It has been a big year for Julius Malema and his recent suspension has gripped the nation.

When we announced the newsmaker a few weeks ago, Julius initially indicated that he didn’t want to come. However, I am delighted that he is here tonight. When he called me this afternoon, I said to him we would love to have him, he responded and I quote “Sharp”.

Julius: Who will ever forget how you handled the BBC journalist in what you called the revolutionary house. I can assure you we are not agents.

Ladies and gentleman...Previous recipients included presidents, premiers, celebrities, sporting heroes and leaders of civil society.

Distinguished guests, it is a great honour for me, on behalf of the National Press Club and AON to officially announce that the Public Protector and the President of the ANC Youth League are the joint “Newsmakers of the Year for 2011”. Congratulations.

Before I ask Advocate Madonsela and Julius to join us on stage...I call on the CEO of AON South Africa to say a few words as our main sponsor of the newsmaker event. Anton Roux please come forward...