

**OPENING REMARKS BY THE DISTRICT
COMMISSIONER MACHEKE T THE PUBLIC
DISCUSSION ON THE PROPOSED BROADCASTING
POLICY**

GANTSI CONFERENCE ROOM
WEDNESDAY 31ST JULY 2002

GANTSI DISTRICT COUNCIL

The Chairman of the National Broadcasting Board and hounorable members of the board. Distinguished guests ladies and Gentlemen.

There is no doubt that we are at the threshold of a very important chapter in the story of our country. Since independence, broadcasting in Botswana has been the domain of government through Radio Botswana and of late RB2 and BTV. However, the promulgation of the Broadcasting Act of 1998 has heralded a new era in that broadcasting is now open to the private sector. As we speak two private radio stations, Yarona FM and GABZ FM are now in their third year of operation.

There are hopes that private television stations will be licensed soon as well as community radio stations. All these developments represent however new challenges. First of all it is incumbent on the National Broadcasting Board to undertake a massive public education exercise to make Batswana aware of their right to engage in broadcasting as a business. It will be a tragedy if this

industry were to be dominated, like many others, by not only foreigners, but by a few elites. By so saying one is not saying let us shut out foreign investment in broadcasting. However a desirable scenario will be one where Batswana participate on equal footing with foreigners. The frequency spectrum is a very scarce resource and it is important that Batswana benefit fully from it.

It is also important to note that while it's an industry like any other industry, it deals with products that have far reaching socio political consequences. The challenge therefore is that we must ensure that broadcasting activities enhance, rather than disrupt the democratic values that this country holds dear. Adherence to the rule of law, nation building and tolerance must not be sacrificed in the name of freedom of speech in our stations. It is therefore up to the National Broadcasting Board to ensure that these are up held. One cannot over-emphasize the fact that the media can make or break a society.

We welcome the current efforts by the NBB to consult as widely as possible in the form formulation of a broadcasting policy. We are confident the results of such a consultation will be truly a national consensus.

We are aware of the fact that this policy will form a backbone for this industry but will however evolve as this industry grows. Botswana is vast and diverse country with different cultural experiences. We are hopeful that the proliferation of the electronic media as

a result of the freeing of the air-waves will enable areas such as Ghanzi to begin to celebrate their cultural experience in outlets that reflect their cultures. We believe that a radio station serving the community of western Botswana will go a long way in not only exposing the talent that's abundant in this area, but will enhance development in this area as businesses advertise their wares.

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