

**SPEECH PRESENTED BY THE
MEC FOR DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE
MAUREEN MODISELLE AT THE
2008 MEDIA OPEN DAY**

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VENUE: MMABATHO CONVENTION CENTRE

The Superintendent-General, Department of Finance in the
North West Province, Mr. Joe Mohala

The Accountant General of the North West Provincial Treasury,
Mr. Geo Paul

Senior Staff of the Department of Finance

Representatives of the various media houses

Communicators from Government Departments and
Municipalities,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Comrades and Friends

Thank you all for honouring our invitation to attend the third Media Open Day of the Department of Finance in the North West Province. I must say that I am delighted to be part of this day because of the importance I personally attach to the media's role in the ongoing socio-economic development process in the North West Province.

This event highlights the high regard the North West Department of Finance attaches to the contributions both the print and the electronic media have made towards the transformation of our province in particular and country in general since the advent of democracy fourteen years ago.

The central role played by the various media during our transition to democracy, is evidence that you have a great role to play in our socio-economic development.

For example, due to the role played by the media important messages regarding how our people should conduct themselves during the transition period reached people at grass root level. The mass media also plays a crucial role in creating public awareness during our elections campaigns.

There is no doubt that the media play a very significant role in society today. The media are all around us. From the shows we watch on Television, the music we listen to on the radio, to the books, magazines and newspapers we read each day. Without the media, people in societies would be isolated, not only from the rest of the world, but from Governments, law-makers, and neighbouring towns, cities, villages and indeed the world.

The flow of information is important for the development of communities and the media facilitate this. Without a wide array of information, people's opinions and views would be limited and their impressions and conclusions of the world around them stunted.

Historically, the most common form of the distribution of information was word of mouth, with the news often beginning with the words: "Did you know...?"

Indeed, word of mouth is still one of the most powerful tools in the sharing of information today, but technology has allowed for this exchange to take place in an instant; forging the way for bigger and better media houses with the instant access to information with the instant gratification factor which goes along with it.

Apart from this, media workers are in essence interpreters of information. All of us, at some point, have been to the library to do research for a paper or report, sifting through piles of information to support a thesis, or to simply explain an event, situation, scenario or person.

You, the men and women in the media do much the same. You do not just provide pages of facts and statistics that the average person might not understand. Instead, *you weed* out the important issues and points, putting them in a context that the average reader and listener can make sense of in order to form their own opinions.

How terrible it would be if we all had to sift through piles of documentation and statistics, or sit through press conferences, just to find out that a bag of maize meal has shot up to R65 per 10kg a bag or why we have electricity power shedding!

Ladies and gentlemen, this is what will occur if the media cease to exist! Without the knowledge of many, the media provide the six basic areas of information: Who, what, where, why, and how. Most of the time, that is all we need to know.

In this way, the media keep us focused on the issues that matter in a surveillance-type way. Disagreeing with our Programme Director, some aspects of surveillance include the latest stock report, sports scores, entertainment, breaking news, progress and results of an election, the arrest of a serial killer or rapist, issues on Xenophobia, food prices, etc.

While the print and electronic media have historically been viewed as being overly aggressive, sometimes called the Paparazi and insatiable in their plight for the latest and hottest news, your “watchdog-type” function is essential in a democratic society where people MUST know what their governments are doing in particular, because governments are public representatives. .

Further, the media have the capacity to hold governments accountable, forcing them to explain their actions and decisions, all of which affect the people they represent. In a democratic society, people should know all their options if they are to govern themselves, and you, the media, have become the vehicle for the dissemination of such information.

Due to the fact that the media have permeated our society, there is a growing assumption in some societies that the press speaks for the people, thus the Freedom of Speech and Freedom of the Press Acts in South Africa.

The reason for the Freedom of the Press Act is to ensure that democracy is able to function, so it is important to understand that such legislation does not only protect the functions of the Press.

With the Press Freedom of Speech Act, we then know what the different views in society are, opening the floor to debate, and discussion, all of which are healthy functions of a democratic society.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to ask all of us who are gathered here this morning one simple question: ‘Why did the Soviet Union and East Germany cease to exist?’ These once great countries crumbled for a simple reason – the people would not be dictated to any longer! The press there was severely censored.

Here we see the power of the media without you; we will all crumble because society will not know that government exists neither will it know what it does.

Ladies and Gentlemen, one of the most powerful strengths the media have in any society is the ability to effect change, both on a social and governmental level. While my focus in this speech has been on the role of the media in society, it is also important to acknowledge the **RESPONSIBILITY** of the media in society.

As journalists, you all have the responsibility to report the unbiased information as it is received from reliable sources. It is our obligation to obtain all sides of a story, and to report on both the good and bad stuff. However, “responsible journalism” also requires a balance of the good and bad stuff in newspapers and in broadcast reports.

At this juncture, I would like to call for balance of good and bad stuff in news publications to support sustainable development, anti-corruption initiatives by government, effective service delivery, sound financial management, i.e. proper use of government resources and funds, the economy, etc.

Many people feel that without reporters and editors seeing the importance of balanced news reporting, and paying closer attention and more care to the placement of the bad stuff in publications, our province’s economy and social development will continue to be hindered.

As I said earlier, technology has allowed for that instant gratification for the sharing of information, and we cannot ignore the fact that news is still being spread with the “Did you hear” system or the grapevine system.

The Department of Finance in conjunction with the North West Provincial Government encourage journalists and media houses to assist in the fight against corruption, xenophobia to sustain the economy and social development in the province, by being more responsible, and seeking the good of society.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to bid all of you a hearty welcome once more to the Media Open Day of the Department of Finance in the North West Province.

I thank you.