

### **Climate change: 'media must come on board'**

By: Issa Sikiti da Silva

The role of the media in the fight against climate change came under the spotlight at the 2009 National Climate Change Summit this week in Johannesburg. "We want the media to come on board and assist us in creating awareness and providing us with suggestions and useful ideas," Roopa Singh, environmental affairs and tourism (DEAT) deputy director of content management, told Bizcommunity.com.

"This process must involve everyone and the media is seen as a vital partner because it does create awareness and gets involved in the information-sharing process that might help us push the struggle forward," Singh said, as an estimated 700 delegates jostled to take up their seats in the plenary on the first day, Tuesday, 3 March 2009, at Gallagher Convention Centre (formerly Gallagher Estate) in Midrand.

### **Deplored minimal and passive role**

Many delegates interviewed by Bizcommunity.com deplored the minimal and passive role of South African media and its 'don't care attitude' vis-à-vis the fight against climate change, urging journalists and editors to stop acting like a bunch of onlookers and send a message out there that this thing is real.

"So far, there have been a few good reports on climate change produced by local media, but that is not enough," Carol Moses, DEAT communications manager said.

"The media's role is critical and we need them to use their influence to send a powerful message - as far as the rural areas - to the ordinary people on the street, thus helping them to make important decisions that can change their lives,"

However, some journalists continue to point fingers at Government and NGOs for their uncooperative attitude to withhold vital information and for sending them from pillar to post when making enquiries about climate change issues.

### **"Power of the media"**

Linda Cilliers, head of research and publications at OneWorld, told Bizcommunity.com, "I don't think the sector realises the critical importance and power of the media in this process.

"The sector is trying to juniorise the media, and in the process not fully utilise it in the fight against climate change. You can come up with good legislation, thousands of strategies and policies but if you don't involve the media, that message will not be propagated and will then be lost in translation," Cilliers said.

"And let's not forget the power of new media (Facebook, YouTube, and others), which is inexpensive but can prove to be a wise and effective tool in the fight against climate change.

"We must become friendly with the media and involve them in whatever we do. Radio and Internet media are hungry beasts when it comes to news and they can really tell a lot of wonderful stories out there."

### **"Must act and act now"**

President Kgalema Motlanthe, who delivered a keynote address at the summit's opening, said, "We must act and act now. We owe it to millions of people who will be directly affected, such as small scale farmers who have to deal with greater climate uncertainty, small exporters and large industries that have to meet the requirements of the markets which are carbonsensitive.

"At the end of our deliberations we should have a policy that allows each South African to answer Wangari Mathai's question 'What can I do for the Earth?'"

Environmental affairs and tourism minister Martinus van Schalkwyk said, "Not only do proper tracking, reporting and managing of emissions make business sense, but it is also an indicator of good governance and of taking co-ownership for the future."

The summit ends today, Friday 6 March.

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