

## **New Press Ombud and two Deputy Press Ombuds appointed Press Council of South Africa creates more capacity to handle complaints**

A new Press Ombud and two Deputy Press Ombuds have been appointed by the Press Council of South Africa (PCSA).

Ms Carmel Rickard is the new Press Ombud. Mr Tyrone August and Mr Herman Scholtz are the new Deputy Press Ombuds.

The three part-time appointments were made from applications received by the independent Appointments Panel of the Press Council of South Africa, chaired by Justice Yvonne Mokgoro. They are part of a restructure of the Press Council's system of mediation and arbitration of complaints aimed at providing increased capacity and efficiency. The new appointees will work alongside PCSA Public Advocate, Mr Fanie Groenewald.

Carmel Rickard writes about the law, justice and human rights. She has an LLM in constitutional law, is a regular columnist for several publications, including Justice in Africa, a weekly newsletter aimed at judges in Africa, dealing with current judicial decisions and related issues of importance to the judiciary. She has experience as a radio journalist (for Capital Radio, the BBC's Africa Service and others) but now works almost exclusively as a print and online writer. After starting as a journalist on the Daily News in Durban, she became the Durban bureau chief for the Natal Witness and the then-Weekly Mail, which later became the Mail & Guardian. She was a Nieman Fellow at Harvard in 1992/3 following which she worked at the Sunday Times and was appointed the paper's legal editor.

Tyrone August was Editor of the Cape Times newspaper as well as Editor of Leadership magazine. He was a founding member of the South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF) and an executive member of the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) and the Black Editors' Forum (BEF). He was general secretary of both the Media Workers' Association of South Africa (Mwasa) and the Association of Democratic Journalists (ADJ). He holds an MA from the University of London and a PhD from the University of the Western Cape.

Herman Scholtz is an advocate at the Pretoria Bar. He is a former journalist with 13 years' experience in newspapers, magazines and broadcast media. Most recently he was the national news and business editor of Rapport and has served as legal advisor to the National Press Club. He holds an honours degree in journalism and a master of laws degree in information and communication law.

Judge Phillip Levinsohn, Press Council of SA chair, welcomed the new appointees and said they would undoubtedly be a credit to and greatly enhance the workings of the Press Council.

PCSA Executive Director Ms Latiefa Mobara thanked outgoing Press Ombud Pippa Green and outgoing Acting Deputy Press Ombud, Johan Retief, for their service to the PCSA.

“Our new Press Ombud and both the Deputy Press Ombuds are highly qualified, experienced and committed journalists. They have strong contributions to make in applying the Press Code and in arbitrating complaints against our more than 400 print and online media members.

“They join Public Advocate Fanie Groenewald in dealing with complaints. Each year we receive between 500 and 600 complaints from the public, including complaints from business and politicians. In terms of our Complaints Procedure, Mr Groenewald receives complaints and attempts to mediate between the complainant and the title. If he is unable to resolve the matter, he will refer it to the Press Ombud or one of her deputies for arbitration.”

Mobara explained that the Press Ombuds can decide matters on the ‘papers’ – by looking at the complaint and the response by the title; or they can elect to hold a public hearing into the complaint – sitting with two members of the PCSA Adjudication Panel, one representing the public and the other the media.

Parties can appeal Ombud rulings to the PCSA Chair of Appeals, Judge Bernard Ngoepe. Should he accept an appeal, Judge Ngoepe convenes an Appeals Panel hearing, again sitting with a public and a media representative of the Adjudication Panel.

“This embodies our system of independent co-regulation, which includes a majority of public representation,” Mobara says. “The system is fast, cost-effective and efficient. It is guided by the requirements of the Complaints Procedures and Press Code which all of our members subscribe to.

“I am certain that our new Press Ombud and Deputy Press Ombuds will make strong contributions. They have a vital role to play in preserving fairness, ethics and integrity in the adjudication of complaints.

“The Press Council also wants to thank the outgoing Press Ombud Pippa Green and her predecessor, Johan Retief. Pippa was a strong, experienced media practitioner who quickly made her mark as Press Ombud.

“Johan Retief has given the Press Council enormous service for more than a decade both as Ombud and acting Deputy Ombud. He was instrumental in the design and application of the Press Code, creating much of the ‘jurisprudence’ and interpretation of the Code which will guide the new team.

“Both he and Pippa have given South Africa enormous service in defending the Press freedom of which South Africans can be enormously proud and in so doing, building democracy,” Mobara said.

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