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## PRESS STATEMENT ON THE eNCA MASK CONTROVERSY

26 February 2021

1. MMA Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) is a not-for-profit organisation that has been monitoring the media since 1993. MMA's objectives are to promote the development of a free, fair, ethical and critical media culture in South Africa and the rest of the continent. The three key areas that MMA seeks to address through a human rights-based approach are media ethics, media quality and media freedom.
2. MMA aims to contribute to this vision by being the premier media watchdog in Africa to promote a free, fair, ethical and critical media culture. MMA has over 20 years' experience in media monitoring and direct engagement with media, civil society organisations and citizens. MMA is the only independent organisation that analyses and engages with media according to this framework. In all of our projects, we seek to demonstrate leadership, creativity and innovative approaches to meet the changing needs of the media environment.
3. As is probably the case for everyone who watched them, MMA's response to the videos (available here: <https://www.capetalk.co.za/articles/409727/enca-reporter-under-fire-for-racism>) that have been circulating of experienced eNCA journalist, Lindsay Dentlinger, interviewing various MPs after the Budget speech, is one of shock. Ms Dentlinger is filmed interviewing a white MP who is not wearing a mask but insisting, immediately thereafter, that the next interviewee, who is black, put on his mask. Unfortunately, other videos have also surfaced showing Ms Dentlinger doing the same on other occasions.
4. The differential treatment of the interviewees is jarring precisely because the only circumstantial difference, on both occasions, is the men's race.
5. What is more shocking, however, and is the reason for us releasing this press statement, is eNCA's entirely inappropriate response to the issue. Its statement (available here [https://twitter.com/tumisole/status/1365162390212538373?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1365162404116631555%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ct](https://twitter.com/tumisole/status/1365162390212538373?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1365162404116631555%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ct)) is a masterclass in missing the point:

- a. It is dismissive of the public outcry, describing it as “general public conjecture”.
  - b. It describes the conduct as “alleged inconsistent behaviour” when on its face it is clearly inconsistent, particularly given the other videos that are available online which also show the same inconsistent behaviour. There is nothing alleged about it.
  - c. It spends an entire paragraph on her experience and record as a journalist. This has nothing to do with the issue at hand. No one is questioning her record or her experience.
  - d. eNCA states that its management has “concluded that her conduct was not racially motivated or with malicious intent”. Again, her motivations and intentions are not the point. What the point is, is that a journalist employed by eNCA, one of the country’s flagship commercial news channels, is conducting interviews in a manner that racializes the wearing of masks by interviewees?
  - e. eNCA states that comments about this are “viciously misleading” and “unfair” when what is being commented on is the apparent differential treatment of interviewees based on race as captured in more than one video. What is misleading? What is unfair?
6. The bottom line is this: videos are circulating that show, clearly, that Ms Dentlinger has, on more than one occasion, interviewed a white person without requesting them to put on their masks while requesting mask-wearing of black interviewees. It is this that eNCA is failing to address. In doing so, the company displays a disregard for the feelings of the people of country who are sensitive to differential treatment based on race, for obvious historical grounds. It is a significant misreading of the importance of equal treatment of interviewees by a news outlet and, in failing to address the issue head-on, eNCA has let down its viewers and the public at large. In closing, we call on eNCA to reassess its response to this issue and appropriately address the concerns raised.

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