

## Biz tells the truth over encrypted digital TV

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Cape Town – The minister of communications, Yunis Carrim who is pushing for an encryption system of free digital TV in South Africa, is being called out for apparent blatant lies, with the TV business saying encryption will "punish the emerging local electronics industry, the local film industry and community television".

The South African government wants to push an encryption system into the set-top boxes (STBs) that the millions of South African TV households will have to buy.

The government has hijacked the process of digital terrestrial television (DTT) – which is supposed to revolve around creating better television for the ordinary TV viewer – for job creation.

TV households will already have to fork out around R800 for a STB – and in many cases also a new antenna in a price to consumers which keeps escalating due to the ongoing delay to start the switch.

The majority of TV households are blissfully unaware of the looming sticker shock when they will have to pay hundreds of rands just to keep watching the public TV programming and TV channels they've been getting for free.

To add to the manufacturing cost – cost which will be passed on to consumers and to viewers – the South African government wants to force the inclusion of what is called a "conditional access system" or encryption in the manufacturing of these boxes.

Whether it is used or not, it will raise the price for the millions of poor TV households of these boxes and make the process more complicated. Where this also isn't in the interest of the TV viewer, is that those getting tenders for the forced local manufacturing of these boxes, will end up benefitting more than the ordinary TV viewers who will end up paying for technology they don't need.

The majority of South Africa's broadcasters like the SABC, all community TV stations, M-Net, MultiChoice and civil society organisations are all against the inclusion of an encryption system in STBs for free-to-air television.

### Digital TV encryption plan 'has no merit'

The National Association of Manufacturers in Electronic Components (Namec) is furious over what it now calls the distortion of facts and the minister of communications, Yunus Carrim's "attempt to rewrite history" when it comes to the aggressive push by the South African government to force encryption into free-to-air, public set-top boxes (STBs) for digital terrestrial television (DTT).

Namec says if the government forces an encryption system into STBs – a plan which it says "has no merit"- it will "punish the emerging local electronics industry, the local film industry and community television".

In a statement Keith Thabo, the president of Namec, which is against the government's policy and push to include encryption in STBs – says that Carrim "in his rush to push through a new framework for the digital migration of South Africa, has resorted to rewriting history, distorting the facts, and again pretend that the views of the black electronic sector do not matter".



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### **'The truth about encrypted digital migration'**

"The minister can insult us, try to deny us our voice, and try to lock us out of future business. But he cannot ignore history, or the truth about encrypted digital migration," says Namec.

"A multi-stakeholder workshop was held on 16 April 2013 to discuss whether or not encrypted set-top boxes were the best option for South Africa. That workshop took a resolution that the requirement for STB control/encryption should be scrapped from government policy in its entirety," says Thabo.

"The resolution was jointly signed by Namec, the MK Military Veterans' Association, the Progressive Women's Movement of South Africa, the Congress of Traditional Leaders (Contralesa), the SA National Civic Organisation (Sanco), the Black Business Council and many other organisations."

"This resolution was submitted to the minister and the Department of Communications, and in the Budget Vote of 21 May 2013 the minister said: "We have taken a decision to review the policy on the STB control system as one way of fast tracking the rollout of Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) to make this system non-mandatory."

"However, when minister Yunis Carrim was appointed he embarked upon a process, which completely disregarded all that had been pronounced upon by government in the past – and decided to bring back STB control/encryption in the draft policy."

"It is incorrect, therefore, for the minister to now pretend that he is merely implementing a cabinet decision from 2008. By doing this, the minister is trying to make the entire cabinet culpable for a decision, which he alone has taken."

### **Lying over other countries having adopted encryption**

Namec says the government tries to create the impression of a trend towards encryption in digital migration in other parts of Africa, in particular in Tanzania, Namibia and Malawi.

"The truth is as follows: In Tanzania, the regulatory authority has mandated a common interface slot in its specification and has not mandated STB control/encryption in all set top boxes. Broadcasters, which have pay TV ambitions, have deployed their own set top boxes, at their own cost, which have their own encryption system. They have certainly not benefited from any government subsidies."

"In Namibia, the regulator published its specifications in a government gazette dated 6 December 2013 rejecting the inclusion of encryption, and specifically states in the specification section: "Conditional Access: No Conditional Access Module to be embedded".

"Malawi has so far not pronounced anything with regard to STB control/encryption".

"It is therefore again a misrepresentation and dishonesty to claim that these countries have adopted the same option that is being put forward by the minister".

### **'Why does the minister insist on encryption when it is unnecessary?'**

"Throughout this debate we have kept asking ourselves one question: 'Why does Minister Carrim insist on encryption, when it is clear it is unnecessary – what is at stake here?'" asks Thabo.

Namec says it is a matter of record that there are government officials among those who submitted proposals for the last round of Requests For Proposals (RFPs) for set-top boxes, in 2012.



"Those same officials will no doubt want to respond to the next round of RFPs – so they clearly have a vested interest in the final specifications that are chosen by government now, before the minister's term ends."

"It would be very easy for these officials to want to influence the final policy decision, in whatever underhand way, so that it favours their chances when the specifications are finally issued."

"Perhaps this is why they are pushing the minister so hard, and advising him so firmly, on one particular system of encryption?" says Namec.

**Disclaimer:** This is an article written by an independent South African TV critic and journalist covering the TV industry. The views of users published on Channel24 are their own and do not necessarily represent the views of Channel24. Channel24 reserves the right to edit or delete any and all comments received.



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