

**ADDRESS BY ICASA CHAIRPERSON, DR STEPHEN MNCUBE TO THE
COMMUNITY OF CALVINIA, NORTHERN CAPE ON THE OCCASION
OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES –
09 DEC 2010**

The Program Director, the honourable Mayor of Calvinia and Councillors, all protocol observed.

The International Day of People With Disabilities is very close to my heart as Chairperson of ICASA. ICASA is an institution mandated by the constitution to support our democracy, and the rights of people with disabilities are at the core of our country's Bill of Rights.

In addition, ICASA is mandated by enabling legislation – the ICASA Amendment Act and the Electronic communications Act – to regulate the communications and postal sectors in the public interest.

To regulate in the public interest is an onerous mandate: it means the regulator must ensure that all conflicting societal interests are taken into account when we license telecommunications, broadcasting and postal operators.

Secondly, the public interest criteria calls on the Authority to balance conflicting societal interests when developing regulations to govern how the three sectors or industries I have referred to above.

But when it comes to matters affecting the needs and plight of people With Disabilities, ICASA has a special soft spot on these issues.

Once again, enabling legislation call for the Authority to dedicate special attention in its licensing and regulatory activities to promote universal service and access to telecommunications, broadcasting and postal services and products.

In so far as ICASA is concerned, universal service and access and the needs of People With Disabilities are two sides of the same coin. The two matters are inseparable. You cannot speak of one without the other.

But what does this mandate mean for ICASA and for our communities.

Universal service and access as spelled out by the International Telecommunications union and the Universal Postal Union require member countries and their respective agencies to develop regulations that should address the following:

- the provision of telecommunications, broadcasting and postal services to all People With Special Needs and to far-flung areas and villages around the country, secondly,
- universal service and access also refers to the user-friendliness of telecommunications and broadcasting equipment

For example, public telephone booths should be accessible to people on wheelchairs, inevitably, such a booth would also be accessible to children who are on the receiving end of all sorts of abuse.

To ensure that the Needs of people With Disabilities are addressed, the Authority has published a Code of Conduct for communications and broadcasting licensees:

- improving and increasing use of subtitles and sign language
- expand knowledge on induction loops, text telephones and alternative computer software
- hearing aids for public telephones, and 70% amplification and proper signage
- access to programme support such as fact sheets
- use website to offer Braille and audiotape
- consult and engage with affected people and their representatives when developing relevant products and services

The Postal Services, on the other hand, provides for postal services facilities to have ramps and special counters. To this end, the Authority conducts monitoring and inspections to ensure compliance with the law.

The Authority will be conducting road-shows and workshops across the nine provinces of the country to inform service providers, consumers and affected groups and individuals about the rights of People With Disabilities, and how to access and exercise those rights.

In addition, the Authority will convene a national Summit in March 2011 that draws industry stakeholders, manufacturers, consumer groups and the various formations representing People With Disabilities.

The summit will deliberate and inform policy and legislation on a wide range of issues, including the impact of technological developments on people With Disabilities.

I hope and believe that some of you will make it to this summit as we jointly seek to shape public policy affecting tens of thousands of our people.

I thank you.