

Letter from TAC to ANC

By *moderator*

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Mr. Kgalema Motlanthe

Secretary-General

African National Congress

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Dear Comrade Kgalema

ANC TODAY ? REQUEST FOR APOLOGY AND RETRACTION

On 17 December 2004 the ANC published Volume 4 No 50 of "ANC Today", which is described as the "Online Voice of the ANC". In an article entitled "Nevirapine, drugs & African guinea pigs" in that publication, the following statements were made about our organisation the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC):

- 1 The TAC "is determined to continue to pursue its mission to promote the widest possible use of anti-retroviral drugs in our country, at all costs".
- 2 The TAC "is quite ready even to deny the reality of established scientific truths".
- 3 The TAC is "(i)ntent to sustain public pressure for the expansion of the market for anti-retroviral drugs in general, and nevirapine in particular".
- 4 "(T)o guarantee and improve the sale of anti-retroviral drugs" is "the central mission of the treatment campaign of the Treatment Action Campaign".
- 5 "Strangely for an organisation that presents itself as African, passionately concerned about the health and lives of Africans, the TAC seems quite happy to "discount the lives of Africans" and to ensure "the implementation of nevirapine in South Africa", regardless of "the significant number of serious adverse events for both mother and infant (that) may not have been collected or reported in a timely manner during the course of the Uganda "study"".

These statements are both untrue and seriously defamatory of TAC.

The article ends with the following statement: "Whose interests does the TAC serve?" In the context of the article, this contains a clearly defamatory innuendo that the TAC is not genuinely concerned about the health and lives of people in South Africa, and that it serves other interests, presumably those of racists and the drug companies. This too, is both untrue and seriously defamatory.

These statements cannot be construed by any stretch of the imagination as fair comment. Many people across the country, the continent and throughout the world take the ANC as a serious and authoritative source of information. The statements, read in the context of the article as a whole, defame TAC and cause serious damage to its reputation nationally and internationally and its work to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS in communities.

The statements and article also do serious damage to the struggle against HIV/AIDS. For instance, the statements in the article on nevirapine are wilfully misleading. They undermine one of the most important public health interventions.

We urge the ANC to be guided by scientists, clinicians, HIV/AIDS experts and not denialist ideologues. It is a tragedy that at a time when new infections, illness and death continue in our communities that ANC Today prints untruths, distortions and slander instead of guiding and giving hope.

TAC hesitates to even consider litigation against the ANC as the party of freedom, democracy and social justice. But unless the steps set out in this letter are taken by the organisation, we will regretfully be obliged to consider litigation in order to protect and vindicate our reputation and work.

The TAC requests that you take the following steps:

- 1 Publish in ?ANC Today? a retraction and apology in terms which are to be agreed between the ANC and TAC.
- 2 Issue this apology and retraction to the media.

The identity of the author of the article is not disclosed. We shall be obliged if you would kindly advise who the author was. Similarly, the identity of the editor of ?ANC Today? is not disclosed in the publication. We shall be obliged if you would kindly advise who the editor was.

Our National Executive committee will be meeting in mid-January 2005. We urge you to undertake the steps outlined by then as a sign of comradeship and co-operation in the HIV/AIDS epidemic. We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience but by no later than close of business on 14th January 2005 so that we may consider this matter at our NEC.

Yours faithfully

Zackie Achmat Siphon Mthathi

TAC Chairperson TAC Deputy-Chairperson

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