

Cultural workers call for immediate end to boycott

THE cultural boycott should be immediately and unconditionally lifted, according to two prominent members of progressive cultural organisations.

This was revealed in a position paper titled "The Cultural Boycott: A Case For Its Immediate Uplifting", written in their personal capacities by Junaid Ahmed, general secretary of the Congress of South African Writers Cosaw) and Mike van Graan, director of the Cape Town-based Community Arts Project (CAP).

Challenge

They challenge the progressive cultural movement to provide leadership and to assert the right to be heard, "not because others fear what might be done to them through the cultural boycott, but because of the validity of ideas, quality of aesthetic work and political maturity".

While agreeing the boycott is necessary under conditions of repression, the paper is critical of progressive cultural organisations which have been perceived as censorship bodies whose primary aim is to control rather than facilitate culture.

Monitor

Many of these cultural organisations grew from a need to monitor and implement the cultural boycott which has served as part of a broader strategy to bring the Pretoria government to the negotiating table.

This function as monitor has caused many artists and cultural workers to be alienated from progressive cultural organisations.

"Fresh forms of organisation need to develop unhindered by the need to monitor the boycott. This is particularly urgent at a time when there is talk of launching a national cultural organisation," Ahmed and Van Graan said.

Lifting the boycott would enable progressive people to address the

legacies of apartheid deprivation by recruiting skilled teachers from other parts of the world.

The paper further motivates that, even if other forms of pressure must be maintained, lifting the cultural boycott now will make more political gains for the progressive movement than maintaining it.

International

Ahmed and Van Graan also argue that the progressive movement would draw more people into its sphere of influence by hosting international stars such as Sting and Tracy Chapman who have been opposed to apartheid.

"Rather than lifting the boycott as part of a package deal when reform is declared irreversible and so losing political points or being forced to abandon it because there are so many violations of it anyway, the progressive movement can assume the moral high ground in the cultural sphere by lifting the boycott," they said.

— Heather Robertson