

Public Must Take Part In Opposing Monopolies

I WAS favoured to have been a member of the general public when the Namibia Communications Bill was debated by stakeholders on Wednesday 29 May 2002.

I would hereby wish to appeal to the reading public to actively take part in this open discussion on a matter that is so urgent and long outstanding - that being competition for Telecom Namibia Ltd. and MTC

How long have we been subject to unjustified monopolies in this country - being Telecom and MTC. I believe the second cellular licence will also be awarded this year or early next year.

It is a requirement of the World Trade Organization (WTO) that all telecommunications markets be open for competition by the year 2004, which is just around the corner. Our Government in the Telecommunications Policy and Regulatory Framework published in September 1999 recognised the fact that competition will come for sure.

Now at the workshop of May 29, nearly three years after the Government policy was published, the Legal Adviser of Telecom Namibia Ltd. pleaded for another exclusivity period for voice telephony.

My very strong plea goes to the Hon. Minister Theo Ben Gurirab and the regulator, being the Namibian Communications Commission, to go ahead and open the telecommunications market for competition. Refuse to let the mighty Telecom Namibia Ltd. once again bring to a halt the telecommunications restructuring process that was started in 1992.

Telecom Namibia Ltd has had a period of ten years exclusivity in which they had enough time to prepare themselves for operating in a free fair and

open market.

On the other hand MTC has had a exclusivity period for seven years and has basically covered the main towns of Namibia with access to mobile telephony.

The actual crux of the matter is we want to have the right to chose the network we want to use. The last few years saw a series of price increases, some over 200 per cent on the pretext of rebalancing of tariffs. How do you rebalance tariffs by increasing the price of local calls and keeping the prices of long distance and international calls the same. Surely something is very wrong if rebalancing is done in this fashion.

By the way and in conclusion, Telecom Namibia argues that it will experience harm when the market is opened for competition. Surely you will lose customers to newcomers but did you think that you might even score increased income from interconnection and of leasing some of the public switched telecommunications network (backbone) to other operators. Another free tip for the Telecom Namibia Top Management is to get rid of three quarters of the managers and appoint more workers - then you would not have to worry about competition.

After all Telecom Namibia Ltd. is an asset of the State and in other words is public property and paid for by the money of the taxpayers.

Congratulations to Willem Bekker and all others who worked on the Draft Communications Bill - with such a document on the table Namibia can once again take the lead in the region.

Viva competition in the telecoms market.

Viva Competition, WINDHOEK

Note: Real name and address provided - Ed