

STATEMENT released by the National Writers Association of South Africa representing 800 authors in South Africa across all of our country's diverse communities, calling for the dismissal of Minister Gayton McKenzie for reintroducing Apartheid-style censorship and curtailment of freedom of speech in contravention of the Constitution of South Africa, the Bill of Rights and the founding principles of democracy, as well as acting on behalf of Israel in contravention of South African foreign policy.

It covers many bases of violation and this sector of the Arts and Culture community, including South Africa, Southern Africa and its diaspora of writers abroad - the largest membership-based writers Association in Africa, makes the statement in the wake of similar action taken by writers in Australia who in protest collapsed the Adelaide Literary Festival when 100 of its 124 writers pulled out because of the censorship of the voice of an Australian-Palestinian.

WRITERS WORLDWIDE are saying no to Apartheid wherever it raises its ugly head and saying no curtailment of freedom of expression and censorship. This is an excellent statement on a Minister who has gone rogue and compromised the President, Cabinet and our Constitution and Democratic order in South Africa. Bravo Writers of South Africa. Never Again shall Draconian Apartheid Culture be allowed in South Africa. Here is the executive statement by the office of the Secretary General

NWASA CONDEMNS ARTS CENSORSHIP AND MICRO-MANAGEMENT BY MINISTER GAYTON MCKENZIE

The National Writers Association of South Africa (NWASA), an apex organisation for writers in South Africa with over 700 members and still counting in the country as well as the neighbouring states and overseas, sadly notes with great concern and alarm, the act of censorship and curtailment of freedom of expression, in the name of government and the South African people by Minister of Sports, Arts and Culture Gayton McKenzie who announced his actions as an act of patriotism.

This the first such Apartheid-type censorship act since the advent of our democracy in 1994 where Minister McKenzie in an unlawful act of overreach, based on his own personal beliefs and that of his party, aligned with the interests of the State of Israel and the views of the South African Zionist Federation, acted to stop Gabrielle Goliath's work from being exhibited at the 2026 Venice Biennale.

The reasons put forward involve the content of Gabrielle Goliath's work, an allegation that her work was backed by a 'foreign power' hostile to Israel, now identified by the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) as Qatar. It is alleged that the 'foreign power' wanted to hijack the South African pavilion at the exhibition to push its own anti-Israeli geopolitical message about the actions in Gaza."

The reference to a "foreign power" it transpires refers to a cultural institution – Qatar Museums who along with other interested parties responding to calls for sponsorships had simply shown a vague interest in purchasing a videorecording of Goliath's production ELERGY that was to be performed in Venice, for the Qatar Museum. There was no final purchase.

SAZF has subsequently issued the elaborate detail of what inspired Minister McKenzie's actions which were deeply political and anti-freedom-of-expression in nature. The real issue for Mackenzie and the Israelis was that a part of the content of the artist Gabrielle Goliath equates Israeli conduct in Gaza with femicide and genocide in Africa. The add on to clumsily camouflage the aim was an

elaborate, bizarre and false claim about the sovereign state of Qatar painted as a subversive anti-Israel power that wanted to use South Africa and this exhibit to attack Israel.

Gabrielle Goliath's artistic anti-violence production ELEGY is a three-suite piece which looks at femicide and LGBTQI+ murder in South Africa, the killing of women by the German colonial occupation in Namibia when the Herero, Nama and !Kung genocide took place in the first decade of the 20th century, as well as the genocidal extermination of thousands of women, babies and children in Gaza from 2023 to date. There is nothing remotely negative or in the realm of hate speech in this timely production.

This inexcusable behaviour by Minister McKenzie on Goliath's work is neither isolated nor once-off incident.

In February 2025, Minister McKenzie interfered with a proposed delegation list of industry-selected and vetted writers to attend the 33rd Havana International Book Fair in Cuba, claiming that he wanted the list to be more demographically representative through the inclusion of Coloured candidates. Yet the industry-supported list did, in fact, reflect a diverse representation of writers, some outspoken about the Gaza genocide. McKenzie replaced this list with this own delegation, some of whose literary credentials were suspect.

NWASA should know better about this because it was part of the task team that compiled the industry list. The task team was a forerunner to the current Book and Content Developers and Creators Council, one of the seven sector clusters councils he has ironically created.

This current act of Apartheid censorship and curtailment of freedom of expression by Minister McKenzie comes at the back of the current debacle involving a similar Israeli Zionist attempt to censor a prominent Australian-Palestinian writer Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah by excluding her from the prestigious Adelaide Literary Festival week where more than 180 writers from around the world, including the former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacintha Ardern were supposed to speak. This censorship and curtailment of freedom of speech was roundly condemned by the large community network of our fellow writers across the world, with whom we stand in solidarity. Consequently, most of the billed writers withdrew participation, leading to the cancellation of the event and subsequent forced resignation of the chairperson and four trustees of the festival board.

NWASA therefore unequivocally, without fear or favour, call on President Cyril Ramaphosa to relieve Minister Gayton McKenzie of his post and to exclude his party from further participation in the GNU, for the sake of the people of South Africa and respect to writers and artists across the world. Only this will send out a message that South Africa does not tolerate human rights abuses at home or abroad and that any attack or undermining of our Constitution and Bill of Rights, or even a whiff of return to Apartheid practices will not be tolerated.

NWASA notes too that the Goodman Gallery also seemed to have chosen to follow in the same spurious and Apartheid-style trajectory as Minister McKenzie and the SA Zionist Federation in abusing this artist and her work. They owe South Africa and the cultural world an apology for embracing an Apartheid draconian practice that we believed that should have been left behind. Otherwise, artists whose works frequently grace the gallery may want to reconsider mounting them at the venue until it behaves like an entity in a democratic state.

- ENDS -

Issued by the Office of the Secretary-General, Dr. Lebogang Lance Nawa

This press statement was released by Khanya College on 21 January 2026.