

Sunday's Media@SAfm show: Madiba and the media

 By Ashraf Garda: [@ashrafgarda1](#)

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Does Mandela need help? Does his reputation need protecting? That in essence was what my vote-line was about on the Sunday Media@SAfm show that coincided with International Nelson Mandela Day, 18 July 2010.

Listeners were asked to vote yes or no on air and via my [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) profiles on this statement: "Nelson Mandela should be protected from media ridicule and satire".

So what do you think the response was? Ninety percent of the respondents voted NO!

Surprised

It's a result that surprised me as we have often debated the need to treat Mandela as a breed apart. In fact, a cartoon in the *Saturday Star* summed up his stature best by suggesting he was the guardian of the world -even if only for one day.

The majority of the no votes were not from people that dismissed Mandela's world stature; on the contrary, they rated Mandela so highly that they felt the grand old man of politics himself wouldn't stand for it. Consensus was that Mandela would not support media censorship, even when the media criticises him.

It is the measure of the man that his brand image is so strong on human rights and freedom of expression.

Wouldn't stand for it

As the voting pattern established itself, I put the same question to my next guest, Achmat Dangor, the man who heads up the Nelson Mandela Foundation. Dangor was firmly in the corner of the no-voters; he argued strongly that this Nobel Peace prize winner wouldn't stand for it.

In fact, Dangor said that at a recent Zapiro exhibition, Mandela laughed loudly at the more critical of Zapiro's cartoons - critical of Mandela, that is. The message was clear: Mandela doesn't need help - a sense of humour is a great weapon!

Dangor also dismissed the concept of Mandela being described as a "[brand](#)"; it's a term "you marketers use, but not us," he said.

The all-important photo shoot

A regular caller to the show, Themba from Alex, was not having it; he called Dangor the greatest evil for allowing Mandela to turn his back on the poor, instead spending his time with American celebrities for the all-important photo shoot.

Dangor argued that "Brand Mandela" does spend lots of time with the poor, both at his home or out in the field. Problem was, said the foundation head, "the media does not chase a photo shoot of the ordinary man."

Critical of irresponsible criticism

Dangor did speak up for the right to be critical of those that criticise irresponsibly. A case in point? The artist that has painted the controversial corpse of Mandela, defying African custom by his images.

Dangor dismissed him as an opportunist who went to the media to generate publicity for flagging interest in his "dead project". But, even then, Mandela and his foundation did not publicly object. That was left to the ANC to do.

I wonder whether we would have a similar response if we had a similar poll for President Zuma or Julius Malema?

ABOUT ASHRAF GARDA: @ASHRAFGARDA1

I host the Special Assignment Investigative Journalism show Thursday 9.30pm on SABC 3 - and I present the Media@safrms show - Sundays 9-11am as well as Afternoon Talk on SAfrms Radio weekdays 2-4 pm

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