

**Mr. Jacob Zuma
Deputy President
African National Congress
8 Epping Road, Forest Town
Johannesburg 2000
South Africa**

Paris, 7 July 2006

Dear Mr. Zuma,

Reporters Without Borders is amazed by the manner in which you have demanded damages from the newspapers *The Star*, *The Citizen*, *Sunday Sun*, *Sunday Times*, *Sunday Independent*, *Sunday World* and *Rapport*, from radio *Highveld Stereo* and from cartoonist Jonathan Shapiro, who uses the pen name Zapiro.

If you think you have been defamed, then it is entirely legitimate that you should seek compensation. But in our view you have not chosen the right way to go about it, and you are liable to do further harm to your image rather than restore it.

The exorbitant amounts in damages that you are demanding from the media seem more like an attempt to intimidate them than the response of an injured party. This approach will only encourage the privately-owned press to turn their sights on you, and will in no way help you obtain reparation for any wrong you may have been done.

We are disconcerted by the way this case is developing and the extent of its impact. We are also worried about the effect that such an unprecedented lawsuit against the press could have if it were successful, as this is a country which, probably more than any other in Africa, knows the high price that must sometimes be paid to win independence and freedom.

If the mechanisms that ensure pluralism and free expression were to seize up in South Africa, the peacemaker and development model for all of southern Africa, it would put the entire region's press in danger. A successful lawsuit by you would give a blank cheque to Africa's authoritarian regimes, which would use your example to attack their own press.

The independent press uses its right to free expression but also gives you the right of reply. We urge you to support the independent press by engaging it in a dialogue rather than brandishing the threat – one that is out of all proportion for a political leader at the national level – of financial and judicial penalties that would prove fatal for all the media concerned.

We hope you will be convinced by our arguments.

Respectfully,



**Robert Ménard
Secretary-General**