



FRIENDS OF A FREE INTERNET

for mahala & for freedom

8 Mzala street
Khayelitsha
Cape Town
8000
South Africa

Email: friends@freeinternet.africa
Phone: +27 72 724 9601
Online: www.freeinternet.africa

Stop Thief! campaign calls on Ramaphosa, ICASA and cell companies to deliver on affordable data promises.

Launch statement: 21 March 2024

On Human Rights Day on the steps of the Constitutional Court the [Friends of a Free Internet](http://www.freeinternet.africa) is launching the Stop Thief campaign demanding MTN, Vodacom, Cell C and Telkom end profiteering and meet their commitments to expand affordable internet access to everyone in South Africa.

The right to communicate (free expression, assembly, and information access) is an important victory codified in the 1996 Constitution of South Africa. But the right will remain mere privileges unless enjoyed by one and all. The digital divide is amplifying and deepening South Africa's inequality as a few enjoy high-speed world-class fibre internet connections while the marginalised majority are either excluded from network access completely or remain condemned to the ghetto of slow and over-priced prepaid mobile connections.

It is now over two years since the historic ICASA spectrum [auction](#) when the government gave R14.4 billion worth of our national airwaves to the cell phone companies. The companies [committed](#) to extend network coverage to 97% of the population, connecting over 32,000 public buildings (like schools and clinics) to high-speed broadband, and making all the mobile content on nonprofit and government websites free to visit.

No progress has been reported. Millions remain without internet access. Data prices remain stubbornly high.

South Africa has a long history of missed connectivity targets and cell phone companies opting to pay fines rather than expand network access. The Stop Thief campaign will not allow the commitments made in 2022 to become just more broken promises.

A campaign highlight will be a 'teach-in' on 17 May 2024 - World Telecommunication and Information Society Day - at the ICASA head office in Centurion from 10am. We have requested the attendance of:

- The independent regulator (ICASA) to share vital information about progress regarding implementation of internet access obligations ([see letter](#))
- President Ramaphosa to address his role in driving the 2022 spectrum auction ([see letter](#));

- The CEOs of the incumbent mobile operations MTN, Vodacom, Telkom and Cell Creceive memorandums from the campaign.

We are tired of broken promises from politicians, empty assurances from ICASA, ongoing price gouging of the mobile companies. Without public engagement we can expect more of the same.

We call on everyone in South African to show their support for a free internet by joining the campaign:

- Via whatsapp: https://api.whatsapp.com/message/7TONZCWJ6C63M1?autoload=1&app_absent=0
- Via Email: <https://freeinternet.africa/become-friend/>
- Via Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/723222048886988/>

We request all journalists to amplify this call in the interests of expanding freedom of expression and access to information for all.

ENDS

For comment contact:

- Andrea Boesak, organiser@freeinternet.africa, +27 63 215 2713
- Mark Weinberg, mark@yetu.coop, +27 66 557 1443
- Tshiamo Malatji, malatji@protonmail.com +27 73 492 9339

About Friends of a Free Internet

Friends of a Free Internet (FoFI) is a civil society alliance launched in July 2022 to unite over 100 civil society organisations (see [list](#)) to advocate for free online expression and universal access to a user-owned, affordable, secure communication network. FoFI is convened by the Peoples Media Consortium and Yetu Infotech Collective. For more information visit www.freeinternet.africa.

STATEMENT ONLINE:

<https://freeinternet.africa/stop-thief-launch-statement>