CASE NUMBER: 36/2002

DATE OF HEARING: 14 JUNE 2002

L WILFORD

VS

SABC

COMPLAINANT

RESPONDENT

TRIBUNAL: PROF. KOBUS VAN ROOYEN SC (CHAIRPERSON)
REV. DANIE DU TOIT
PROF. ROBIN SEWLAL
MRS. DOLLY MGOQI

FOR THE RESPONDENT: MRS DOROTHY VAN TONDER, ACTING MANAGER, POLICY & REGULATORY AFFAIRS, CORPORATE AFFAIRS, SABC AND MS ANNETJIE FOURIE, MANAGER, PROGRAMME ACCEPTANCE, SABC3

Crime – portrayal of success of crime in serial – not harmful within the context of fiction.

SUMMARY

When a gang in the Soap series celebrated their success, a viewer complained that such a celebration was in bad taste and that it, in effect, had an effect on the crime rate.

Commission holding that the incident was natural for all fiction and that within the context of the story line, no reasonable viewer would take the incident seriously.

Complaint not upheld.
The 13th May episode of the serial *Isidingo* included scenes where a gang was celebrating a successful theft.

The Registrar received the following complaint:

**“RE: SCREENING OF “ISIDINGO”**

Last night’s screening of Isidingo, where Georgie Zamdela and “What-What” enjoy a celebrity drink after “cleaning out” a house in Krugersdorp, was in bad taste. Just this morning, it was reported on the news that an elderly couple were found stabbed to death in their home in Meredale. After just such a “cleaning out”. This sort of scene glorifies crime! I’m sure many a rogue sitting watching Isidingo on their stolen tv’s last night, had a smirk on their faces from ear to ear.”

The SABC responded as follows:

“Isidingo is a South African soap serial and like, all drama must have a large measure of credibility. Consequently, it has to reflect the realities of South Africa life. The Character of “Georgie” has been in the story for a very long time. He is a gangster and has spent time in prison – robbery is his business. For him and his side-kick “What What” to celebrate having “cleaned out” a house is a credible scene: they would hardly be lamenting their lot. It is important to remember that this is a serial, not a single drama. It has a story line that develops, and an incident such as this cannot be judged in isolation. The development of this part of the story is that in a week or two “Georgie” has a heart attack, bringing his life of crime to an end. “What What” is shot by the Police. The message: crime does not pay.”

This Commission is all too aware of the high crime rate in South Africa. We accordingly have understanding for the concerns of the Complainant. However, before we can decide whether a crime orientated episode of a series is harmful to watch, there must be a clear and serious support for crime expressed in an episode. We do not believe that this was so in the episode complained about. The characters are well known to the viewing public, which have come to know their successes and their mishaps. Fiction must, within the limits of this genre, be allowed to portray life as it is and there is nothing in this episode which goes further than mere portrayal. We do not believe that any criminal will take the fictional scene seriously. He or she knows real life and that what is portrayed, is far removed from the real world in which they live. It is of interest to note that a study of juvenile delinquency in England in the early nineties, found that many young criminals...
interviewed seldom watched films. One cannot, of course accept this as a fact which would be valid for all times, but it is indeed informative. Compare Hagell and Newburn *Young Offenders and the Media – Viewing habits and preferences* (1994). The habits of these children were also found not to be different from school children, who were not involved in crime. A definite link between crime and television or films could, accordingly, not be established. The authors did, however, point out that further study should be undertaken and pointed towards certain limitations on the ambit of their research for this project. 

We realize that the episode was broadcast in the early evening and are accordingly also aware that this is family watching time. We, however, remain convinced that the incident would be seen by all reasonable viewers, including children, as pure fiction. 

**The complaint is not upheld.**

**JCW van Rooyen SC**

**CHAIRPERSON**