



# SAfrican rights groups decry move to launch porn channel

*Text of report by South African privately-owned, established daily newspaper The Star website on 26 February*

[Report by Lyse Comins: "Rights Groups Attack DStv's Porn Proposal"]

CHILD rights activists and faith organizations have condemned MultiChoice's announcement that it was researching the viability of a pornographic channel, saying it turned women into sex objects to "serve the whims of depraved men" and contributed to sexual abuse perpetrated by children.

Jackie Rakitla, MultiChoice's general manager of corporate affairs, said yesterday that they had had many requests for adult content.

"At this stage, we are only conducting research to establish the extent of interest and whether it is feasible to introduce such a service. We sent a survey to a limited number of subscribers, all of whom are over 25.

"MultiChoice conducts research into viewers' preference on an ongoing basis, at least once a month.

"There is a lengthy process of research and testing that is followed prior to any new service being launched.

"In the last few months, MultiChoice has been inundated with requests to provide adult content on DStv."

Rakitla said that if the channel was launched, MultiChoice would ensure that safeguards were in place to prevent young viewers from accessing the content.

The announcement has nevertheless upset child rights activists and religious organizations. Taryn Hodgson, the coordinator of the Cape Town-based Christian Action Network, said her organization would urge its affiliates to cancel their DStv subscriptions if the company introduced an "unacceptable" channel.

"Should DStv introduce such a channel, it would be supporting those who exploit, objectify and degrade women. Porn violates women's constitutional rights to dignity and equality."

She added that there were more than 150 studies showing links between porn and harm.

"The family is the basic building block of society and it is suicidal for any society to tolerate such an exploitative industry. If such a channel is allowed, it would pour fuel on the fires of sexual abuse and exploitation."

Shaheda Omar, the assistant director of Teddy Bear Clinic, which helps abused children in Joburg [Johannesburg], said her research had shown that access to porn on TV contributed to child-on-child sexual abuse.

"This country is ridden with violence and violence begets violence. If it is flighted on TV, the signal conveyed is that this is normal and acceptable behaviour and it is almost giving permission to children, who do not have the capacity to process this information accurately.

"A study I have been busy with...found that 60 per cent of children had indicated that their sexual behaviour was influenced by what they had seen on TV on late-night channels.

"It's not so easy to monitor children because parents go out or are asleep...then the children act out on each other... They re-enact what they are seeing and have a pleasurable sensation because that is the way our bodies are programmed."

Mufti Zubair Bayat, the director of the Darul Ihsan Islamic Services Centre in Durban, said religious people should "call for the condemnation of pornography" as a vice that corrupted society. "Pornography is viewed as a dirty practice that corrupts the mind, pollutes the soul and propels human beings towards vice and immorality.

"(It)...degrades women, rendering them sex objects that merely fulfil the sexual whims of depraved men.

"Many of the unnatural sex acts shown in X-rated movies add to the degradation of women. "There is no doubt that pornography has contributed...to human trafficking," Bayat said. He said it also contributed to sexual violence, rape, murder and child abuse.

Clive Human, the chairman of Standing Together to Oppose Pornography, said that although DStv was suggesting codes and passwords to restrict access to the channel, it would not prevent teens from viewing it.

"Eleven-to 17-year-old boys are the largest consumers of pornography and we are now beaming it into homes.

"No matter how tight the tools are, all it takes is for one adult to leave it open and the kids get in." The Film and Publication Board (FPB) was concerned about DStv's assertion that it had been inundated with requests for adult content, said spokeswoman Sibó Myeni.

"In a recent research study conducted by the FPB exploring the public attitude towards sexually explicit material and the regulation thereof...it was found that many South Africans support the idea that pornographic material needs to be prohibited," she said.

*Source: The Star website, Johannesburg, in English 26 Feb 10*