



Media profession body moves to protect scribes



Female journalists abused – ZUJ



One on One with Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (VMCZ) Chairperson

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Harare – ZIMBABWE Union of Journalists (ZUJ) Secretary General Foster Dongozi revealed in Harare on September 4 that his organisation plans to set up a fund and hire lawyers on retainer to protect its members in times of occupational danger after admitting that the work environment for reporters in the country was littered with security problems.

“On the issue of security for journalists particularly given the kind of environment that we are operating in we have since launched a safety fund which will be used to defend journalists in any form of problem whether be it legal or otherwise,” said Dongozi, speaking at the Annual Media Stakeholders’ Conference organized by the Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ).

“And because we are a labour organisation we have also put a network of lawyers around the country.

“It’s a rapid response force of lawyers that is going to respond to any cases that warrant or need attention.”

Dongozi also revealed that the media profession body, seeing the gravity of the

security issues had decided to carry out safety trainings for journalists, but added that the government was suspicious of the trainings.

“When IMS sponsored a training in Zambia, the next thing was that we were being accused of undergoing military training in a foreign land,” Dongozi said.



ZUJ Secretary General Foster Dongozi

Dongozi also claimed that there was a lot of snooping activities by global governments on journalists on the pretext of security enforcement.

“With the internet fast becoming the major route of communication, authorities across the world have made snooping on journalists their top priority, Interception of Communications Act and so on.

“We have been seeing a lot of evidence that there has been quite a lot of snooping on our telephones and internet that

goes on depending on the level of your prominence,” he said.

Dongozi said that there was little chance that professional journalism and the ethics of news reporting will be strictly adhered to in an environment where journalists felt threatened and news reporters were susceptible to corruption if they did not get adequate remuneration.

“At the International Federation of Journalists we say in an environment of fear and poverty, no professional or ethical journalism can be expected to thrive,” he said.

Female journalists abused – ZUJ

Harare – WOMEN journalists live in constant danger of being sexually manipulated and subjected to gender-based abuse from the learning institutions right up to the various newsrooms in the country throughout their career, a professional and labour body Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ) has revealed.

Foster Dongozi, a veteran male journalist and the ZUJ Secretary General made the startling remarks, while presenting on the topic, “Safety, Security and working conditions of media practitioners” at the Annual Media Stakeholders’ Conference organized by the Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ) held in Harare on September 4, 2013.

"In line with the working environment, the issue of sexual harassment is the big elephant in the room that we don't want to talk about," he said. "But the debates that we have held across the country have indicated that from university the female journalism students are abused in exchange for higher marks by lecturers.

"It does not end there, when they go to the news room they are abused and harassed by colleagues and senior people in the newsroom and also subjected to sex for in return for better recommendation, or something like that."

Dongozi further claimed that the problem was not being perpetrated by lecturers and bosses alone but implicated news sources from different sectors of society as being part of the culprits in this abominable usage.

"And it gets even worse because even the news sources, very respectable men and women that we did not expect to do such things end up stalking them as well," Dongozi said. "But obviously following our interventions the cases have reduced because we are talking about them and we are naming and shaming the culprits.

"So some people while you mention it, they will think that you are talking about them so they will quickly stop whatever they are doing which is a plus for us."

Towards redemption for Zimbabwe's media industry: One on One with Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (VMCZ) Chairperson

Following the recent launch of the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (VMCZ)'s report titled "The State of Journalism Ethics in Zimbabwe July 2013"; the Crisis Report sought out the views of VMCZ Chairperson and veteran journalist Tapfumaneyi Machakaire (TM). Below are his views on the way forward for Zimbabwe's media practitioners and how journalists can redeem themselves from the follies of unethical conduct that have become normative in the profession.

Crisis Report: According to the report, the standards in the journalism industry have been seriously lowered due to rampant unethical conduct - do you think that the industry can recover?

TM: Yes the industry can recover but a lot needs to be done for that to happen. Politicians should stop abusing and dividing the media into two camps with the public media being forced to regard their role as that of defending the ZANU (PF) government while the private media sees its role as fighting against the ZANU (PF) Government. Media practitioners should realize that polarization of the media was born out of

the polarization of the forces behind the media.

Crisis Report: What can be done to facilitate such recovery?

TM: There is need for more workshops that combine journalists from public and private media to deal with issues of ethics, accuracy, fairness, and balance. Journalists who attended workshops that were held before the July 31 harmonized elections from both camps indicated that they are prepared to adhere to ethics.

Crisis Report: What challenges or obstacles are likely to impede this process?

TM: The major challenge is with the Editors who tell them that the story has to have a particular slant against or for Mugabe and his party. The bigger challenge however would be convincing the editors to adopt a professional approach. For a start however, if we can have reporters dishing out balanced stories and avoiding self-censorship, we will have gone a long way towards achieving our goal.

Crisis Report: How can the editors' cooperation be facilitated?

TM: VMCZ should continue to monitor and expose media organisations that continue to run unprofessional and unbalanced stories and denounce the use of hate language. VMCZ should also emphasize that politicians recognized and accepted their undue interference with the media by including a section in the GPA, which focused on improving professionalism in the media industry.

Crisis Report: Do you think journalists are prepared to restore ethics in the industry?

TM: In the report we released there are comments from journalists from both the private and public media who indicated that they are happier producing balanced stories if something can be done to influence their editors to be professional which I see as a good starting point. Journalists often tell us that they deliberately give the slant just to please the editors and earn a living but will be doing it against their conscience. If you, for instance, are able to read stories that are written by journalists from the public media to the foreign based website masters you can easily tell that they are clearly aware that they are being abused.



Crisis Report: What can be done to ensure that journalists stick to this ethical path?

TM: There is also need for an improvement in working conditions of journalists so that they are not forced into "prostitution" to get the extra cash for survival. I believe that there are very few "bad apples" among our journalists and it is normal under the circumstances to have such individuals. Efforts should be made to convert those and make them realize that their role is to be the watchdog of society and not to be the megaphone of certain politicians. Politicians will come and go and the journalism profession will remain. The VMCZ ethics committee shall continue to preach the gospel of professionalism and advance the one family concept where journalists by adhering to professional ethics become members of one family, the Fourth Estate.

END

The Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition is a broad based civil society network of over 72 active members comprising churches, women's groups, social movements, residents associations, labour unions, human rights lawyers, and health professionals. It was formed in August of 2001 to focus on democracy, human rights, good governance and sustainable development issues – working locally, regionally and internationally.