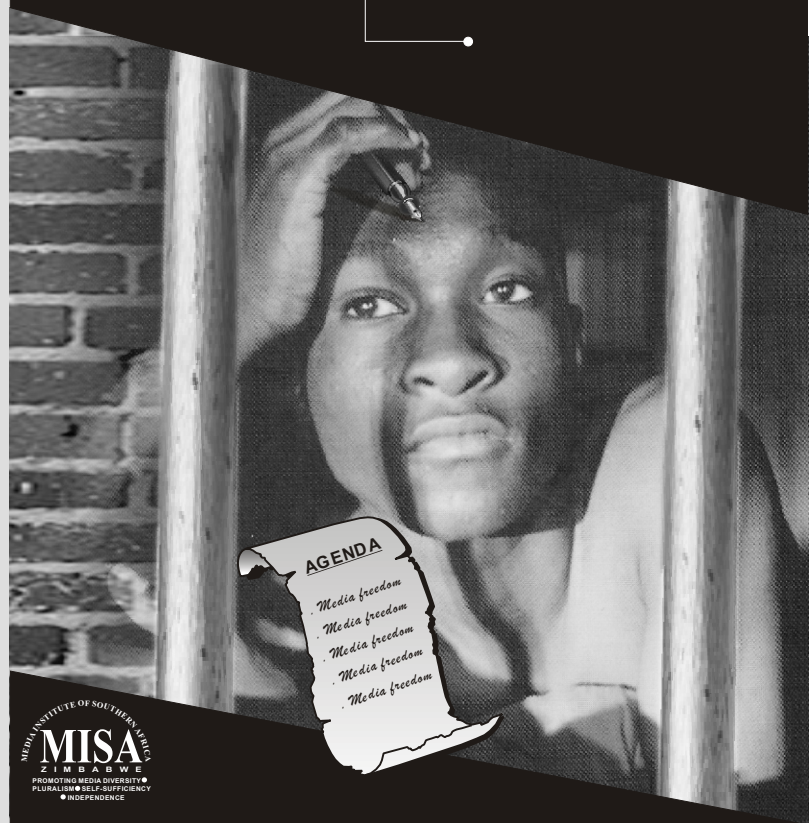




PROMOTING MEDIA DIVERSITY ●
PLURALISM ● SELF-SUFFICIENCY
● INDEPENDENCE

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REPORTING IN THE LINE OF FIRE



Narratives by Zimbabwean journalists-2007

FOREWORD

For those that have been following Zimbabwe's unfolding crisis during the last five years or so it is common cause that Zimbabwe's media landscape is one of the most difficult terrains to navigate and penetrate outside a war zone.

The minefields that have been planted to restrict media freedom and freedom of expression come in the form of repressive legislations such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), Public Order and Security Act (POSA), Broadcasting Services Act, Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act and only recently, the Interception of Communications Act. There also exists a battery of other restrictive laws such as the Official Secrets Act and Miscellaneous Offences Act, to name but a few, that play a dubious complementary role to the restrictions imposed under AIPPA and POSA.

Scores of journalists including those working for foreign media organisations have been assaulted, threatened, arrested, detained or deported since the enactment of AIPPA and POSA in 2002 while those working for the local independent press continue to be vilified as agents of imperialism. Several others have been rendered jobless following the closure of The Daily News, Daily News on Sunday, The Tribune and Weekly Times by the Media and Information Commission, the statutory media regulatory body. In this publication, nine Zimbabwean journalists offer insight into the inherent risks of working as a journalist in Zimbabwe through personal narratives of their harrowing experiences at the hands of those that wield the power to determine what should and should not get into the public sphere.

Cognisant of the fact that no story is worth dying for, we are more than grateful that these brave journalists survived to tell their tales. In equal vein, we are even more mindful of the fact that freelance cameraperson, Edward Chikomba, is not amongst us today because and sadly so, he was not fortunate to survive and live to narrate his ordeal at the hands of his captors. Chikomba, a former employee with the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation was found dead on 31 March 2007 on the outskirts of Harare after he was kidnapped by unknown assailants who have still not been accounted for. May his soul rest in eternal peace and inspire us as we remain committed to our lawful professional calling as purveyors of the Zimbabwean story.

As MISA-Zimbabwe we remain cautiously optimistic that a new political dispensation characterised by tolerance, respect for human dignity, reconciliation, diversity of views, peace and national harmony is on the horizons. AIPPA, POSA and BSA should therefore be repealed among other concrete steps that need to be taken for the emergence of the envisaged new socio-economic and political dispensation. And, in expressing our gratitude to those who contributed to this publication, it is MISA-Zimbabwe's hope that their experiences and our memories of Edward Chikomba will not be in vain but should instead inspire us all and guided by *The People's Charter* of 9 February 2008 to reflect on the past and collectively declare: *Never again shall we let lives be lost, maimed, tortured or traumatized by the dehumanizing experiences of political intolerance, violence and lack of democratic government.*

Loughty Dube

Chairperson

MISA-Zimbabwe



“Horror at the hands of Mugabe's police”



By Frank Chikwore

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” These words were penned in a prison cell in 1963 by one of America's best-known advocates of equal rights Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. These powerful words remind me of the must-forget events of May 18, 2005 - exactly 15 days after Zimbabwe joined the rest of the world to commemorate the United Nations World Press Freedom Day, and less than two months after the nation celebrated 25 years of "independence and democracy," when President Robert Mugabe's administration saw it fit to victimise me for an unjust reason.

My offence according to the arresting police details who viciously assaulted me the with the butts of their guns, clenched fists and booted feet was filming them as they raided flea market stalls as the Harare administration launched a crackdown on what it called “illegal foreign currency dealings and structures” which degenerated into what became later known as Operation Restore Order (Murambatsvina). I had never imagined a gun being pointed at my head and a state security agent calling me a “sellout”! This was the first time I asked God to have mercy on me for my world was crumbling before me. The government blitz, according to the UN Director of Habitat, Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, left more than 700 000 Zimbabweans without shelter and sources of income. It is this human catastrophe that the state did not want me to expose that resulted in the assaults by the police and my subsequent detention at Harare Central Police Station.

While in custody I thought I would now be safe from the assaults only to realize that that marked the beginning of the horror show. My thoughts shifted to the possibility of death at the hands of the police who by nature are supposed to be the custodians of human rights. The police were moving me from one cell to the other so that lawyers Jessie Majome and the late human rights lawyer Lawrence Chibwe acting under the instructions of Wilbert Mandinde who is the Legal Officer with MISA-Zimbabwe - would not be able to locate me. It took them more than three hours to finally locate me. They were not furnished with any charges as police details manning the station were saying the arresting and investigating officers were not present. I had no choice but spend the night in a tiny, filthy and overcrowded cell where I could hardly lift my leg and without any access to food or water.

It was after the intervention of Majome and Chibwe on the following day that I was released without charges. Their decision not to prefer any charges was premised on the fact that I had not committed any offence as I was in possession of my press accreditation card as required under the repressive Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA). It was surprising that the police had to arrest me first in order to investigate instead of the opposite. Regrettably, my arrest came after the closure of the largest circulating daily newspaper, The Daily News. It seemed to me that

the government was determined to silence all dissenting voices in the wake of the closure of The Daily News. But let me go back to the illegal raids. They were made at around 1700 hours when the vendors were winding off their day's business. Many of the raided vendors I spent the night with at the police station were complaining that their money, wares and other personal belongings had been confiscated by the police. I smelt a rat. When I was released, I had the chance of speaking to some of my former inmates and they told me they could not recover most of their items from the police. I wonder if they ever got them from the officers who conducted the raid the Juliet Troop of Chikurubi Support Unit. The question that remains to be answered is: what was the state trying to hide if the actions of the police officers were in conformity with internationally accepted human rights standards? There were other incidents of arrests that I endured - the latest being on 27 March 2007 when heavily armed police and intelligence officers raided the headquarters of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) at Harvest House in search of arms. This followed the petrol-bombing of government institutions, police stations and shops belonging to ruling Zanu PF party members.

I had just finished interviewing Budiriro legislator Emmanuel Chisvuure whose house had been raided the night before when the cops stormed Harvest House. The police used maximum force to arrest everyone who was in the building. Most of us were subjected to police brutality at the MDC offices. We were forced to lie face down and the police officers randomly assaulted people with batons and the butts of their guns while some of them filmed the assaults. I still do not know what they are going to use the video footages from that day for. MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai was not spared during this raid but was released moments later without any charges. We were taken in our numbers to Harare Central Police Station and several people were assaulted in police custody including former Daily News journalist Luke Tamborinyoka who is now part of the opposition's information department. Some of the MDC activists were accused of engaging in terrorist activities, they were but later acquitted after spending over two months in remand prison.

I must also state that it did not matter to the police that I had my accreditation card. I was only released the following day but I was lucky that charges were not framed against me. However, I want to put it clearly that by victimising me for no apparent reason, the police have actually strengthened my resolve to report more on human rights violations perpetrated by the state more than before. There is one salient point that reigns supreme journalists are obliged to ensure that they inform their audience on events as they unfold. However, experience is the best teacher no story is worth dying for and journalists need to be cautious especially when covering political stories in Zimbabwe.

But is this the independence and democracy that our mothers and fathers died for during the liberation struggle when we, as journalists, are not allowed to perform our duties freely? The answer is a big NO!

***Frank Chikowore is a freelance journalist based in Harare. Email
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Be wary of what you say and do within the earshot of the innocent-looking car park attendants



By Sydney Saize

As I woke up on a Wednesday morning on January 18 2006 I pondered where I would get the next story idea for the day. Being a freelance journalist is fun. It's equally challenging as time has to be budgeted for and deadlines respected for the various media houses that one writes for. As I left home I never imagined what I was to face that day. Arrest! During that period there were numerous reports of political victimisation of opposition activists especially in rural areas in the hands of ruling Zanu PF youths mostly youths from the notorious Border Gezi youths training centres. A close source tipped me of one such development in Marange, about 80 km West of Mutare in Manicaland province.

I made an arrangement to meet and interview eyewitnesses to the assault of the primary school teachers. After conducting the interviews and recording of the story I filed it. Immediately after filing the story from what I thought was a safe place, I got picked up by a man who I suspected was a war veteran given his pro-Zanu PF lexicon as he accused me of working for Western imperialists bent on reversing the gains of the armed struggle and so forth and so on. He must have been within earshot when I had just signed off my script on the assault of the teachers. The war veteran who introduced himself, as Cde Moto was a carpark attendant but had suddenly given himself arresting powers. Cde Moto immediately called for police assistance in the wake of my resistance of his suddenly self-assumed arresting powers.

He approached a police officer that had knocked off and was on his way home; the police officer however said there was “no case.” Cde Moto berated the police officer branding him a sellout and that he would report him to his seniors if he failed to handcuff and take me to Mutare Central Police Station. He complied, but ignored the order for him to handcuff me. While Cde Moto was arguing with the police officer I quickly sent a message to Trust Maanda of the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights. I sent another message to Innocent Gonese, a lawyer. I send my wife another SMS message. At the police station I was handed over to the officer in charge who dutifully radioed his superiors from the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), the Army, the police's law and order section and the Zimbabwe Prison Service.

My attorneys Gonese and Maanda were denied access to see me that evening. My wife was denied the chance to visit me and let alone bring me something to eat. The head of the police's Law and Order section, a sergeant Dhlwayo led the interrogations. It was tough. They accused me of filing a story for Voice of America during which I reported that militants of the ruling ZANU-PF party had beaten teachers in Marange, west of Mutare. Another possible criminal charge I was to face was that of practicing journalism without accreditation and publishing falsehoods punishable under the

Public Order and Security Act of 2002. There were about eight of them, representatives from the CIO, ZNA, ZRP and the ZPS, very senior members; judging by the look of their uniforms they were putting on and imposing features they had. They asked me to assist them play back the Sony mini disc recorder which they had seized. I complied. On the basis of what I had recorded from witnesses they claimed that I had stage-managed the interviews to discredit the Zimbabwe government for the love of the US dollar! They seized my cell phone, a Nokia 2650.

Fortunately for me I had already contacted the persons who mattered about my situation. Police officers can be a fun lot! They made me explain the reasons behind my having various mobile numbers of senior government ministers, politicians, businesspeople etc. It was exhausting. They went through my messages that included the dirty jokes I share with friends. They laughed at some of the jokes and copied some of them onto their own mobile phones. The interrogation, which included questions such as how much was I being paid for selling the country? Who else was doing it? Who are your masters? Can you work for us? Are you not afraid of dying? The questions rained in. They never gave me a chance to answer one single question at a time as more would be thrown in. After more than four hours of interrogation they dispatched me to the cells. They searched my pockets, took my wallet, notebook, trouser belt, recording equipment. The mobile phone, they had already confiscated. I was shepherded to the cells. They were filthy, filled and dark.

It was during the peak of the smuggling of sugar and other basic commodities from Zimbabwe to Mozambique resulting in the arrests of scores of smugglers who filled the cells. Some would be hauled in at midnight. Inspection of the suspects was conducted every three hours. Sleep was difficult owing to the pungent smell of the inside cell-toilet and that of the unkempt smugglers. The three-hourly inspection and parade of suspects was a bore. Mosquitoes would also have their field day during these inspections. The following morning Thursday 19 January I was again denied access to my lawyers. But eventually my wife was allowed to give me food. The police's argument was that they were still investigating my case and would not want me to get into contact with them. Later that afternoon, members of the Law and Order section detectives Mushwete, Jonhera, Jochore and two others told me that they wanted to search my house. They said they suspected I was operating a studio and broadcasting falsehoods about Zimbabwe to outside countries.

They found nothing after ransacking my home and leaving everything upside down. In shame they confiscated a high voltage electric cable I had bought but had lost the receipt, alleging I must have stolen it since I had failed to produce the supporting purchase document. Friday, I was only able to see my lawyers on Friday. First to arrive was Maanda to whom I handed my warned and cautioned statement. The police refused to have me appear in court. They argued and boasted they could even apply for an extension of my detention. Maanda left and Gonese later pitched. His efforts to have me released fell on deaf ears with the police determined to detain me over the weekend until Monday. That Friday night which was my third night in cells was horrible as there was no space to even sit straight or sleep.

There were over 100 suspects in a cell that is supposed to hold at least 30 people. Hope

was fast fading. I was leaving everything to the Almighty. I think that is exactly what the police desired - to break my will to fight on. Saturday was to be a special day. That morning my attorney Gonese filed a successful urgent application with the Mutare magistrate court demanding my immediate release. Previous applications were unsuccessful. Sergeant Dhliwayo who was to be served with one of the papers had suddenly disappeared and could not be located in Mutare. I had been informed that he had conveniently moved from his home to an unknown destination. However, I was released that Saturday 21 January as the state was not prepared to take me to court that day arguing they would only do so on Monday. Gonese was later quoted in the media saying: "On that basis that is when I made an urgent application for his release, which was granted. The truth is that the charge is just weak . . .

The court said the state can follow by way of summons." In short I was arrested for allegedly violating the draconian Access to Information for Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) by working as a journalist without a licence issued by the government Media and Information Commission (MIC). I was also being accused of filing a "false" story to the United States-based Studio 7 radio station alleging that ruling ZANU PF party supporters had beaten up teachers in Marange. Under Zimbabwe's tough media laws, it is an offence punishable by a two-year jail sentence for journalists to practice without a licence from the MIC. Journalists also face a maximum 20-year jail term for publishing falsehoods. During my stint in cells, Foster Dongozi, the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists secretary general, condemned the arrest and my subsequent detention saying: "While we welcome his release, ZUJ cannot understand why he was detained in the first place," said Dongozi

AS LONG AS IT DOES NOT SEND MY MOTHER TO THE GRAVE I SHALL WRITE IT.



Herbert Chikosi

I remember very well when my poor mother cautioned me against my decision to be a journalist. She tried her best to drill into me that being a journalist in Zimbabwe was different from going to a picnic, but with no success. It only took a short period of time for my mother's words to come back and haunt me. Firstly, I was abducted in Harare's western suburb of Rugare, a suburb whose name is suggestive of happiness and peace, but alas there was to be no happiness for me on that day as the militia pounced on me. On the day in question I was abducted in broad day light and assaulted and tortured in addition to earning a seven-day stay behind bars. That was way back in 2003. From 2002, the media industry began to shrink and the architect was (former Minister of Information and Publicity) Professor Jonathan Moyo and his ZANU PF government. I failed to make it in this cut-throat profession in Harare as the media space shrunk. I was left with no option.

I packed my bags back to Masvingo to try my luck there as a freelance journalist. The province is the hotbed of factionalism mostly within the ranks of the ruling ZANU PF. Within no time I had carved a niche for myself as a freelance journalist. My reportage on the nature and extent of the factionalism soon earned me more enemies than friends. At one time I was ordered out of the local press club and threatened with unspecified action by a senior ZANU PF official. The state agents went on a witch-hunt to establish the source of the stories. I kept undercover but little did I know that my fellow journalist would betray me. Like the biblical Jesus I was sold for a junket. A certain reporter then disclosed my pseudonym to the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO). My cover was blown.

Then came the story of the junior police officers who refused to sing the national anthem protesting against poor salaries. They were forced to trot around the town as punishment for their refusal to sing the national anthem. The story received wide publicity which resulted in the Officer Commanding Masvingo province earning a stern reprimand from the Police Commissioner in Harare. He was summoned to Harare to explain how the story had been leaked to the press and bring to book the author of the story in question. The police's public relations deputy, Tinaye Matake was then tasked to bring the British sponsored and American-based Herbert Dapi (presumed author of the story) Dead or Alive to the police station in Masvingo.

One of the female journalists as I was to realize later, was reportedly in love with a senior officer is said to have disclosed me as the author of the story. I was then summoned by Inspector Tinaye to the police station for questioning on 26 February 2007. Inspector Matake informed me that his task was to take me to Chief Inspector Phibion Nyambo who wanted to question me about the story. From the onset and as I

entered his office I sensed trouble. Nyambo asked for my accreditation card and I told him that although I was a journalist by profession, I was not practicing hence I did not have the document in question. He then narrated how he had been tracking me and threatened me with unspecified actions.

He openly stated that that I was writing and filing for foreign papers from the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA)'s offices and wanted to know where their offices were located in Masvingo. He said co-operating in that regard would earn me my freedom. It was at that very stage that I started regaining my confidence and composure. I told him that I was not the 'Herbert Dapi' that they were looking for. I did not deny that I was a MISA-Zimbabwe member. I produced all the necessary identification documents but that did not put him off as he maintained that he was going to charge me. My response was that charging me would give me the chance to defend myself against the false accusations.

I was released after about an hour of interrogation after I had also threatened to press charges against the police. He offered to take me for a treat at their Phoenix Bar, but I declined the invitation. Nyambo nevertheless persisted on knowing more about MISA and I told him that it was a membership driven organisation which promotes press freedom. After my ordeal I became more passionate about the calling of the profession and that if telling the truth is an offence so be it as opposed to denying people the truth as long as it does not send my mother to the cemetery, I shall write the truth.

Playing hide and seek with the police

By Millie Phiri

It was December 2005 when I had a taste of the wrath of the draconian Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) when police raided the Voice of the People (VOP) Radio Communications Trust Offices in Harare's central business district. The Trust serves as a production house for organisations that would want to use its facilities. Some of its programmes are currently aired via Netherlands Radio on short wave. Only three female reporters two of them interns- were in the office at the time when the police stormed in on a Friday afternoon. After spending a couple of cold miserable nights in the filthy cells at Harare Central Police Station, the three reporters were released in exchange on the condition that VOP's of executive director John Masuku should hand himself over to the police. Masuku subsequently spend four day in the cells only to be released a day or two after Christmas.

After arresting Masuku, the police were now hunting for the members of the Board of Trustees who included me, David Masunda (chairman), Arnold Tsunga, Bella Matambanadzo, Nhlanhla Ngwenya and the now late Lawrence Chibwe. We played hide and seek with the police as we knew that turning ourselves in was tantamount to entering the lion's den because the courts had closed for the Christmas and New Year's holidays. We were also not prepared to give ourselves up so easily because we knew that the Act that we were being charged under was and still is one of several oppressive laws in existence in Zimbabwe since independence in 1980 which curtails freedom of speech and expression in this country.

We also knew that the law in question was already under scrutiny by the courts, after Capitol Radio, labeled a pirate station, challenged the Act's constitutionality arguing that it maintained the monopoly of the state-controlled Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC). We were therefore aware that our detention would be totally unjustified and wrong. Thus for close to three weeks, police would dispatch teams to raid our homes. Worse still, the police were looking for people they did not know which made our hide and seek game with them much easier. For instance one of the board members who was on his way home from the shops spotted the raiding team from a distance to his home, quickly made U-turn and drove to a safe haven.

During my hiding period at the places of friends and relatives I felt robbed of my dignity and sense of belonging as I feared returning to my own home. All of a sudden I was homeless, I had been stripped of my right to shelter, freedom of movement and a means to earning a living. I also realized that I was now on my own as friends or relatives could only take me in for a limited period. It was even harder for someone like me who have children, because they could not understand why they had to go and squat at other peoples homes. At the same time I could not exactly explain to them that I was on the run fearing that this would traumatise them. I did not receive any counseling as this predicament unfolded, not even at the end of the ordeal this was now between me and my God.

When the courts resumed sitting after the festive season, our good lawyer, Beatrice Mtetwa felt it was time to face the judicial system. She called a meeting and set a day that would see all the Trustees reporting to the police station. She had managed to secure an undertaking from the Attorney General's Office and the police that we were not going to be harassed, detained or tortured. When we arrived at Harare Central Police Station, Mtetwa objected to any of her clients being interviewed as she had prepared written statements and demanded that we appear before a court of law the very same day. Initially the police complied but after going through the grueling process of getting fingerprints and photographs taken, there was a change of mind, we were to spend the night for completion of interrogations. However, our highly experienced and esteemed lawyer would have nothing of that. She was more than ready to file an urgent application with the High Court to order for our immediate release. The police finally agreed to our appearing before a magistrate on initial remand. We were all granted bail and ordered to report every Friday to the Law and Order Section at Harare Central Police Station.

We, however, were in for a shock. Little did we know that the process of being released after paying bail would be stressful and intimidating. We had to endure sexual suggestive remarks from other accused persons and remand prisoners while in the holding cells at the courts notwithstanding the unsmiling and rude prison officials. For the few hours that we were in the cells one could also sense how the poor or underprivileged were denied justice due to ignorance of their rights. Inmates complained of lack of access to their relatives so that they could seek bail or inform them of their imprisonment. The two lawyers in our group immediately took the opportunity to give free legal advice to other inmates but when prison officials discovered this, they quickly whisked them away. The two female inmates in our cell scribbled some phone numbers to us so we could alert their relatives of their situation upon our release.

After our release, there were to be several further remands until our lawyer successfully managed to have the reporting conditions relaxed. Finally, in September 2006, the magistrate removed us from remand and described the case as a “circus” and ruled that the state should proceed by way of summons if they found any new incriminating evidence against us. In fighting for our discharge, our lawyer had among other things argued, that we were being denied our right to freedom of movement and were living in uncertainty and fear and that the case against us had no legal foundation.

End

The day I came face to face with ruling Zanu PF militias

By Godfrey Mutimba

“Today we will teach you a lesson, you sellout being used by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) to expose us,” barked the gravel-voiced Joe Masanga, a war veteran and Zanu PF youth militia leader. For a moment, I thought that was the end of my life. Surrounded by more than 10 armed Zanu PF militias, I closed my eyes and said my last prayers. “Lord, this is the job that you entrusted in me. Forgive me for all the sins that I have committed on this earth, and do accept me in Paradise.....”

A heavy horse whip struck my back suddenly bringing me back to the reality of my brutish situation as I shrieked in agony. Questions started flying from the youth militia-some armed with knobkerries, catapults and machetes-on how and why I came to Mushayavanhu Business centre, 25 kilometers from Gutu- Mupandawana, one of Masvingo province's largest and politically volatile districts. With little time to respond to any of the haphazardly asked questions and in view of the weapons they were carrying, I realised dialogue was the only option that would stop the mob from making me pay the ultimate price. In a split of a second, I pulled out my Media and Information Commission (MIC) accreditation card from my wallet and flashed it at the youth militia leader, together with that of the paper I write for, *The Zimbabwe Standard*, an independent weekly largely viewed as anti-government because of its unbiased reportage of events in the country. But the Standard ID only served to make matters worse, as I was slapped in the left eye. Stars flashed in broad daylight as it was around 12:30 hours. “Sit down before we discuss your fate,” was my next order.

Eight militia stood guard against me and a colleague who had accompanied me while the youth militia leader and his close lieutenants discussed my fate in hushed voices a distance away. Being an overzealous reporter with less than five years in the profession, and with no training on deployment into hostile environments, I had braved the situation to go and make a follow-up of claims that opposition supporters were being denied food aid as punishment for attending the memorial service of the late MDC National Treasurer, Isaac Matongo. Village heads were reported to have threatened the people that those who attended the function risked being struck off from the list of those permitted to buy maize meal from the Grain Marketing Board.

A week earlier, mourners were barred from attending his memorial service after heavily armed riot police barricaded the road at Zvavahera Turnoff which linked with the now deceased's rural home. The police even made a follow up and dispersed mourners who had walked the 25 kilometres to Matongo's rural home through mountainous terrain to avoid detection. “Phone my editor and tell him that you have held me hostage here in the course of my duty,” I blurted at the youth militia leader, desperate for my freedom. One of the youths produced a brick-sized cellphone. But, instead of phoning my newsroom in Harare, they phoned the legislator of the area, Lovemore Matuke, who is also Zanu PF's provincial commissar in Masvingo. After speaking to Matuke they were referred to the ward councilor Benson Dandira who then asked whether I was accredited. Dandira then saved me from further harassment after producing my MIC card and told the militia to release me of which they did reluctantly though and after close to six hours of detention.

An innocent shopping day turns into a nightmare

By Gift Phiri

“Are you going to continue writing for *The Zimbabwean*?” the interrogator quizzed, for the umpteenth time now. “Yes I will. That’s what I do for a living,” I replied. “Listen young man, if people don’t look after themselves, they will not survive,” he admonished. This was Superintendent Chani, interrogating me in his office at the Harare Central Police Station’s notorious Law and Order section on April 1, 2007. The other five men in his company were yelling and cursing. He was struggling to restrain them. How dare I put up a show of defiance after all that beating?

The interrogation began as soon as we arrived at Harare Central Police Station. I had been picked at a cashing- point in OK Supermarket in Sunningdale while paying for my groceries. I was surrounded by four armed police officers and told I was under arrest. What was the charge, I inquired. “Its politics,” came the reply. I immediately fired bulk SMS messages from my cellphone to MISA, Zimbabwe Union of Journalists and to an officer in the British Embassy’s public affairs section. I was force- marched to the Sunningdale Police Post at gun point and thrown into filthy cells. This was around 4pm. I was held at this post until dusk. While detained there, a Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) operative who resides in Sunningdale, known as Hwande, was granted access to the cells, took a passing glance at me and called someone, presumably his boss, and told him: “*Chef, munhu uya tazomubata manje* (Boss we have finally apprehended that person).”

After two long hours, two officers from the Law and Order section, Tapera Ranjisi and another, arrived at the Police Post, bundled me into a police truck and drove me to Harare Central Police Station where I was herded into Superintendent Chani’s office. From his line of questioning, he clearly had no other motive but for me to reveal my sources in the security forces, the President’s Office and intricate details of how *The Zimbabwean* - a newspaper printed in exile - was being brought into the country, by who and how much I was paid for stringing for this “anti-government paper.” They showed their vicious nature when that failed. They threatened to handcuff me and pull out all my teeth. physically abused me.

However, around 7pm or 8pm in the evening, they then employed several tactics to break my courage- twisting my ears and mouth, slamming me hard against the wall, and handcuffing me in a foetal position, notoriously known as “weighbridge” in torture parlance. They told me “you are refusing to cooperate” and then ordered me to take off my trousers. I refused. A vicious man then grabbed my collar and pushed me down. My body was shaking, and I was sweating profusely. Then the assaults started. The six men took turns to strike my buttocks and the soles of my feet with a rubber truncheon while pinning me face down with a smelly boot. With each blow, I could feel the assailants summoning maximum energy to ensure maximum impact.

I couldn’t bear it any more and had to sit down. At some stage I was rolling on the ground in pain. As I braved their insane beatings, the pain somehow no longer seemed to bother me. I was able to observe their lunatic behavior with a clear mind: these people are

determined to silence me, I thought to myself. This way, time passed by imperceptibly and the vicinity drifted to the distance. As I started drifting away, the head of the goons took out a baseball bat and continued striking me. I tried to block the blows using my hands, but I heard my finger snap. I screamed. The beating did not stop. As he was beating me, he was also mumbling. I couldn't see his crazy face, but I clearly heard the voice of a demon saying in the Shona vernacular: "You think you can return this country to the British, young as you are. Do you know what it took to win our Independence?" Meanwhile, my finger was bleeding profusely. I was literally messing Supt Chani's office from the bleeding. "Get him out of here," Supt Chani screamed. I was taken to another room where there was a gang of about seven people. I was immediately ordered to toyi-toyi on my sore feet. I was ordered to lie down and the beating continued. Again rubber truncheons were used to whip my buttocks. This time, the beating was more intense because this gang was high on drugs and alcohol. I could smell that from their breath. I tried to scream hoping I could appeal to their conscience but it was in vain.

After what seemed like eternity, I was handcuffed and leg ironed and driven to my home in Sunningdale by four people. They ransacked my home, seized my computer, floppy disks and memory sticks. They also confiscated copies of *The Zimbabwean* newspaper and business cards of fellow journalists. The officers also damaged my refrigerator, DVD player and home theater charging I had bought the items from "ill-gotten wealth" obtained by "selling out the country." I was driven back to the Law and Order section and forced to sign a warned and cautioned statement admitting to charges of publishing false news and practicing journalism without accreditation despite my spirited remonstrations that I was in the process of regularising my accreditation with the Media and Information Commission.

I was then taken into the cells, unable to walk, sit or lie down. Throughout the ordeal, I could feel the protection of the Almighty God. I knew I was there because of the impact of my articles and this is why I had been singled out. I knew I was exposing the excesses of the Mugabe regime, saving my fellow countrymen who were deceived and misled by the lies of the dictatorship. Hence, no matter what happened to me, my mind was tranquil, without any anger or regret. Instead, compassion arose in me. For a while, I had difficulty in breathing. I was shaking all over. I could not sleep. It was a near death experience. Just after 8 am the following day, I was taken to the infamous Room 93 in the Law and Order section and interrogated again. To my surprise, I found I had totally regained my spirit and physical strength, as if nothing had happened to me.

This time they used a different group of people, with a soft approach. At noon, the interrogator was changed again. He said he was a clairvoyant, but seemed to utter only lies and nonsense. He started to beat me when I paid no attention to his nonsense. He slapped in the face and struck my right leg. He pulled out the baseball bat and started assaulting me on the soles of my feet. Movement for Democratic Change activists who were in the same room were all numbed and motionless watching his execution. Not able to get his way, he became exasperated. I could not take it anymore. If I remain silent these people will kill me, I thought to myself. I struggled onto my feet and with all my strength I yelled out: "I will continue writing! I will continue to practice!" They were angered and rushed to grab and beat me. I screamed out loud so the whole building could hear, "Help! The policemen are killing people!" They all stopped immediately

and dragged me to a chair. Exasperated, he ran towards me and jabbed my right ribs with his knee. I passed out instantly.

At around 5pm or 6 pm they took me back to my cell. They never touched me again after that ordeal. I was taken to court five days later. I was remanded out of custody and immediately taken into hospital. I spent five days at Dandaro Clinic undergoing treatment. I was discharged on my own accord after receiving reports that policemen were seizing political activists from hospitals and taking them into custody. To my assailants all I can say is: Evil can never conquer righteous forces!

A brush with Mugabe's police

Steve Bloomfield

Source of story - Kubatana

Taking a photograph of an empty shelf does not constitute a crime in most countries. But in Zimbabwe anything is possible.. International journalists are banned from reporting from Zimbabwean soil. Monocle spent a week posing as tourist.

In a Harare supermarket a young man in jeans and a T-shirt approached Monocle's photographer Frédéric Courbet, and identified himself as a member of the Central Intelligence Organisation. He frog-marched Frédéric to Harare Central Police Station, but I managed to return to hotel where I hid any evidence of journalistic work. Then Monocle's fixer and I went to the police station where it took more than two hours to locate Frederic who was being held in the Criminal Investigations Department. Despite a massive budget and unlimited manpower the authorities lack certain resources. A simple Google search would have swiftly proved that Frédéric is a photographer and I am a journalist.

Three officers came back to the hotel to search our room. They were not thorough, and my bags went untouched. They had no evidence, but still wanted to hold Frédéric. The senior investigating officer broke away from his colleagues and intimated he wanted to say something. For a price, he said, Frédéric could be freed tonight. We settled on US\$150. As I handed over the money, the officer said: "You have to understand, Zimbabwe is a very difficult country at the moment. These people will arrest you if they see you again." There are certain distinctions within the police force as evidenced by members of the regular police and those employed by Mugabe as spies. The secret police, said the officer, will do anything to keep him in power. The next morning, he said, we should leave Harare immediately and make sure no one was following us.

"I know what you're doing here," he said. "Just don't put my name in your paper."

Accredited, arrested, detained, released

By Blessed Mhlanga

On Wednesday 4 April, four days after my wife had given birth in Chinhoyi to our first child, Lorraine Ruby Mhlanga, and hardly an hour after I had arrived in Kwekwe from visiting the newly born daughter three plain clothes police walked into our newsroom to arrest me. This happened as I was still rejoicing and bragging about how good it felt holding my first child in my arms. I have enjoyed the hospitality of various hotels while participating in a number of training workshops, but nothing quite prepares you for the “hospitality” of the state. Even though this was the second time I had forcefully been booked into police custody, this is never a pleasant prospect. My arrest was the beginning of a two-day journey into hell.

On being hauled to the police station I was informed that Chief Inspector Mhlanga had a few questions that he wanted to ask me. I was not informed of the nature of the questions that he wanted to ask me. All the joy about my new little angel was erased as fear gripped me. On arrival at the police station I was met by Mhlanga himself who immediately ordered me to take off my shoes hurling all sorts of obscenities at me and that he was going to teach me a lesson about journalism at the 'institute of reform (cell) proudly funded by the government'. At first, Mhlanga said he was going to charge me for operating without accreditation in violation of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA). I quickly produced the accreditation card from the Media and Information Commission confident that I would be on my way home within an hour of my arrest. That was not to be. The charge immediately changed to that of criminal defamation.

The state alleged that I had defamed the Chairman of the Midlands Cricket Association (MCA), Freddy Kapuya, when my newspaper, *The Midlands News* on March 23 published a cricket opinion piece under the banner: “Its not politics, but cricket stupid.” They argued that the headline was defamatory in nature and as a result I was to appear in court the following day. To them my crime was so serious I had to be kept in custody for the night. After about 15 minutes as I was being detained behind the reception counter at the police station, Kapuya emerged from the office of one top police officer from where they were obviously discussing me. On seeing me, Kapuya went frantic and started hurling insults at me. Instead of addressing the allegations at hand he called me an opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) sympathiser who was being funded by certain handlers to destroy the country. As to how he arrived at that conclusion, one can only wonder at that.

My charge although not official was that of having allegedly defamed him, but the repeated accusations by him and his police friends was that I had destroyed the country. He told or instructed the police that I was to hang and be taught the lessons of this country. “These young men have destroyed the country ... he should remain in custody until after the Easter holiday stay spat,” spat Kapuya in the Shona vernacular. In the article which led to my arrest I had pointed out that Kapuya and his friends at MCA were

destroying a vibrant cricket association in Midlands through politicisation of the sport. Kapuya who in 2003 was defeated in Redcliff's Ward 9 council elections on a Zanu PF ticket and with absolutely no background in or knowledge on cricket was appointed as the top man at MCA because of his political connections. The crime which cost me my freedom for two days and a night was of having exposed the electoral fraud at MCA and Kapuya's background. He is this year again running for council on the same ticket and in the same ward.

I was later sent to a filthy cell which at one time, in March 2006, I had shared with a colleague James Muonwa on allegations of writing a false story. The matter is yet to be concluded and is still before the courts two years later. To me, this latest arrest clearly had nothing to do with the law. It was to educate me on who, what and what not to write. The police did not lay any official charges. On the second day, they told my lawyer Prayers Chitsa, who had been dispatched to my assistance by MISA-Zimbabwe, that they were still investigating and could not take me to court on that day. Since it was on the eve of Easter, they said I could only appear before the courts after the holidays.

My heart sank as it dawned on me that they planned to detain me for four days. Reports that the police were now in the habit of effecting arrests in order to investigate instead of the other way round proved to be true in my case. The story was published on March 23 and I was arrested on April 03 yet investigations were still to be completed. In the cell, I was bundled in with 10 other accused persons. One of them had blood stains all over and I later learnt that this was the result of a bloody fight with his victim who was recovering in hospital. Others were self-confessed shoplifters who openly bragged that they had bribed some police officers and would be released without charge. That a professional like me was locked in the same dark (even by day) and filthy cell with hardcore criminals for daring to tell the truth angered me but at the same time motivated me to stick to my convictions as a professional.

We slept on the hard concrete floor and the 10 of us were forced to share six filthy blankets. In the morning we went through a humiliating process where everyone was lined up and made to confess to crimes they may not have committed at all. I spent my first day chatting with self-confessed criminals. My lawyer, courtesy of MISA Zimbabwe, tried in vain to secure my release. Colleagues from various media houses in Kwekwe and my Editor, Owen Matava, maintained a vigil outside the police station in solidarity. They brought me food and supported me morally. Their support was overwhelming and almost brought me to tears. Nobody told my wife about my arrest not wanting to upset her. On the second day my journalists' friends vowed to demonstrate against the police' unprofessional conduct, while from inside I vowed to go on hunger strike unless I was taken to court or released.

During the time I was locked up, the police invited me to one of their offices not for purposes of laying any charges, but to interview me as a witness in a case reported about two months before my arrest against the same Kapuya. He had stormed into our newsroom and attempted to assault a female journalist, Irene Kalulu, again over a story on cricket. No action had been taken by the same police who were so eager to arrest me before concluding investigations. It was sad that while they knew my address and were I work they had to wait until after arresting me so that I could give an eyewitness

statement. Nothing was ever heard about that case and Kapuya is still to appear in court. My release was only secured around 6pm after my Editor had met with the Officer Commanding Kwekwe District DESPOL Charles Chagonda over my arrest. Chagonda immediately ordered Mhlanga to release me.

I was an accredited journalist who had been arrested, detained and released without any official charge being laid against me. On my release Mhlanga called me to his office and warned me that he was watching my every move and was still investigating me. As I walked home my experience in the hands of the police for the second time in less than a year, hardened me and awakened me to the responsibility that I hold as a journalist. It gave me a new resolve and understanding of the meaning of being a human rights defender. It gave me a new understanding of my mandate to expose the abuse of power by public office bearers and politicians who think they are more equal than others.

This experience did not deter me. Instead, it encouraged me more as evidenced by the investigations we opened in the following weeks into the MCA election scandal and the unprofessional conduct of the police which I reported in even greater detail.

My sincere gratitude to MISA Zimbabwe, colleagues and my Editor who stood by me during my arrest.

My Experience



Fungai Machirori

It was a cloudless Thursday April morning and I was running late for a 10.15 am lecture. As I joined the class, about 20 minutes late, I took a seat and began to scurry among my things for a pen and notebook. But just as I found them, my lecturer's voice broke off as the sound of loud voices below interrupted the peaceful atmosphere in our lecture room. Soon, the whole class had huddled up against the windows of the room to peer down two floors below and discover what the cause of the commotion was. A group of male Student Representatives' Council (SRC) members had congregated at the main entrance to our block of lecture rooms and, through a loud speaker, were declaring their rights as students to access the university premises. They were holding that demonstration against the erection of a fence around the campus a fence that had been put up to bar students who had not paid fees entering university grounds.

Fees for state university students, which had previously been payable through government grants, were now to be borne entirely by students. Those without the means to do so were to simply discontinue lessons. New student identity cards were issued to those who had paid their fees. And the fence, referred to as the 'apartheid fence', served as a means of ensuring that only paying students could access the campus. The demonstration soon soured with the arrival of a group of riot police who proceeded to take the students into their custody, handcuffing them in the process. Sensing a good news story for our departmental publication, our lecturer asked whether any of us had a camera so that we could document the event. I had a camera on my person.

Slightly hesitant, I accepted the task. I went out of the classroom and stood against the railing of the outdoor balcony, peering down, trying to get a good angle of the riot police and the students. But the resolution of my camera was not powerful enough. Tentatively, I descended one flight of stairs, then another, and another, until I was on the ground floor, just behind the group, all the while trying to get a good photograph of the scene. Naively, I thought that I might be able to stroll past the group and point my cell phone in their general direction to get a good front view. If I acted casually, I thought, they wouldn't think much of what I was doing. When I acted out this plan, however, one of the policemen noticed me and immediately called me over. As I did, he noticed that the cellphone I was holding had a camera. Then a higher-ranking official dressed in grey shirt, khaki pants and blood-red polished boots instructed me to show him the photographs I had taken. As I had not by then found a favourable angle, I had nothing to show for my efforts. However, this did not convince the officials, who convinced themselves I was working for one of the international media houses banned from reporting in Zimbabwe. Just a few weeks before this incident, students had staged protests against the new fees structure on-campus, and the international press had caught wind of the activities. These police officials believed that I was a remnant or informant of that international group an idea I found completely incredible.

I was ordered to produce my student ID card, which I promptly did. "It's fake," the senior official concluded. "She's working for the BBC." At those words, I knew I was in trouble, and yet I didn't know how to respond. No amount of laughing, convincing or begging would change this man's mind, as absurd as the allegation was. "You'll be charged and spend the weekend in the cells," he added coolly. He believed that I had somehow managed to hide the photographs that I had taken in a secret folder in my phone and that someone at the police station would have to look at the phone and find it. My phone was confiscated and I was made to wait with the group for a police vehicle to come and fetch us to the police station. Hot tears of disbelief began to sting my eyes. I had committed no crime and yet there I was in the custody of a group of riot police. As the late morning slowly morphed into a blazing afternoon, the handcuffed students, the policemen and I moved to sit under a shady tree while waiting for the police truck to arrive. The senior official radioed the station for an estimate of how long it would take the truck to arrive. The voice on the other end assured him that the truck was on its way. "You better learn to be strong," one policeman said, matter-of-factly, preying on my fears. "Where you are spending the weekend won't be too comfortable." Another motioned as if to throw a teargas canister at me. Seeing my fear, he laughed. Yet another informed me that I would have a weekend-long bout of diarrhoea from all the sadza and beans I'd be eating at each mealtime. The handcuffed boys, none of whom I knew, reassured me that none of what the policemen said would come to pass.

By lunch time, the police truck still hadn't arrived, but my friends from other departments and faculties had come out of their lectures and were flashing concerned glances towards me as they walked past. I understood their fear of coming any closer or trying to communicate with me. My classmates still stood huddled upstairs, peering down at me, but from afar. I felt hopeless and alone. After about a three-hour wait, the police truck finally arrived. A group of women picked for a miscellaneous offence were already aboard the truck. Somehow, the policemen, the handcuffed students and I had to fit in the back of that open truck with them. We contorted ourselves into the uncomfortable space and made the short drive to the central police station in town. On arrival, we were taken to the back area of the station where a dark narrow passageway led to the room from where we would be charged. By that time, fear had given way to defeat as I awaited my turn to be charged. *What will they charge me for*, I wondered. I had all the evidence to support who I said I was and not a single photograph of the student demonstration in my camera phone.

As I waited, another police official was called one with exactly the same phone I had. Mine was handed over to him for inspection. "See what photos she took," he was instructed. Quietly, he set to the task and in less than a minute concluded that there were indeed no photographs of the campus incident in my phone. Without any evidence of a 'crime', I could not be charged. I was told that I could leave a great relief not only to myself, but also to my lecturers and the local media lawyer whom my university department had engaged to mediate in the confusion. I thought of the others, less fortunate than I, who had been taken to the charge office and indeed might spend the whole weekend imprisoned for exercising their freedom of expression. Fortunately, however, they were handed lenient fines which they managed to pay. They were released a few hours later.

Reaching the voiceless through alternative radio-The VOP experience.



By John Masuku

JOINING Radio Voice of the People (VOP) as its Executive Director on August 1 2002, little did I know that I was in for a journey of rude awakening, fright and hope as I became part of a group of cadres dedicated to promoting media freedom in Zimbabwe through alternative outlets. Many friends and relatives had thought that I would be the last person to join what was often described by state propagandists as 'opposition media bent on causing division and ethnic hatred in the country'. Understandably so since I had spent almost 27 long years working for different sections of the state-run Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) from where I rose through the ranks from being an all-round announcer/producer. I also held several senior positions including being head of two radio stations and later becoming the general manager of all the four national radio stations before being put in charge of Montrose Studios in Bulawayo whose portfolio included news coverage and programming emanating from the city as well as from Matabeleland North and South provinces as well as parts of the Midlands.

On my first day at Radio VOP my immediate task was to instruct the VOP lawyer and a senior journalist to go to Harare Central Police station in order to claim back all recording equipment, files and documents which had been seized two weeks before by the police accompanied by officials from the electronic media regulator the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ). No specific charges had been laid against VOP then and that gave me a lot of confidence and hope. Little did I know that bigger and frightening things were still to come. On 29th August 2002, almost a month after I had joined Radio VOP a devastating bomb blast completely destroyed the station's office in the leafy suburb of Milton Park in the capital, Harare. Two powerful bombs had been planted in our offices in the middle of the night and they went off thus reducing the whole spacious house into ashes and razing all the furniture inside. Surprisingly, after this dastardly act, which has not been accounted for by the authorities, Radio VOP staff, management and trustees resolved to continue with their work of providing alternative media in an environment that denies many citizens and groups the opportunity to be heard—simply because they see things differently and they dare to say so!

The following year, 2003 was to see Radio VOP journalists Shorai Kariwa and Martin Chimunya being abducted by ruling ZANU (PF) youth militia and veterans of the liberation war when they were covering the much publicised 'final push' march which was organised by the main opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) as a way of demanding immediate political change in the country. In a related incident state security agents and armed police then searched the home of this writer hoping to find 'subversive documents and equipment that transmit divisive messages'. Nothing of the sort was to be found. Chimunya was later to be locked up for covering a Zanu (PF) conference in Masvingo without valid accreditation from the Media and Information

Commission responsible for accrediting journalists and media houses. Established in June 2000 by concerned Zimbabweans mainly from the media and legal fraternities within the civic society organisations, Radio VOP which broadcasts in Shona, isiNdebele and English, promotes the right to free information for citizens so that they can make informed choices. It lobbies and advocates for political, economic, cultural and social development through alternative broadcasting. The station's position became almost untenable when the Broadcasting Services Act was introduced in 2001 effectively quashing all independent media by withholding broadcasting licences from private media through the government appointed broadcasting regulator. Responding to a BAZ advertisement in December 2004 Radio VOP and other private companies applied for broadcasting licences but none of them were granted a licence due to some flimsy reasons. That episode showed government's unpreparedness and seeming unwillingness to open up the airwaves in the near future while the state-run Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation's monopoly continued to prevail with no end in sight. Sadly, the recent so-called Thabo Mbeki initiative, a dialogue spearheaded by the South African president meant to bridge the differences between Zanu (PF) and MDC failed to address the issue of obliterating all repressive media laws like the Broadcasting Services Act, Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) and Public Order and Security Act (POSA).

Incensed by the alternative views and balanced reporting emanating from the private stations such as Radio VOP, but evidently locked out in the so-called public media, the ruling Zanu (PF) party, through the same initiative sought to have the opposition party compelled to stop short wave stations broadcasting into Zimbabwe to which the later responded that it had absolutely no control over. Radio VOP works hand-in-hand with NGOs like Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights in educating the public about basic human rights. The station has also explained the importance of having a democratic constitution with the assistance of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA). It has also produced some civic education and media development programmes with the assistance of organisations such as the Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network (ZESN) and Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust (ZIMCET), Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) and Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition in order to promote active citizen participation in their own affairs. The station, which also covers political and socio-economic news, frequently runs popular on-air competitions and gives away Short Wave radio sets to winners.

Radio VOP broadcasts two one-hour long programmes to Zimbabwe and the region everyday via Radio Netherlands' transmitters in Madagascar. As a production house the station sends its files by E-mail, Internet and courier for airing on the shortwave band. It receives funding from a range of international donor organisations which are committed to issues of democracy, good governance, transparency and the creation of open societies in general. On 15 December 2005 the police, accompanied by staff from BAZ and state security agents raided the office of Radio VOP in Harare's Central Business District. They arrested three journalists Maria Nyanyiwa, Nyasha Bhosha and Kundai Mugwanda together with this writer who is the executive director of the station and detained them for four nights together with hard core criminals in dirty police cells

infested with lice and mosquitoes. The charge - contravening the draconian Broadcasting Services Act by allegedly running a radio station inside Zimbabwe without a licence from BAZ.

Later, we were joined under the same charge by six VOP trustees, David Masunda (then Chairperson), Arnold Tsunga (then Vice-Chairperson), Isabella Matambanadzo (current Chairperson), Nhlanhla Ngwenya (former treasurer), the late Lawrence Chibwe and Millie Phiri (current vice Chairperson). Radio VOP vehemently denied the charge through its legal counsel Beatrice Mtetwa, an internationally acclaimed human rights and media lawyer who has successfully represented many journalists and media houses. However, the state's case was very weak from the very outset since Radio VOP programmes are broadcast by Radio Netherlands on its airwaves via relay transmitters in Madagascar in the Indian Ocean. Time and again the government of Zimbabwe jams its signal including those of similar stations beaming from London and Washington using powerful Chinese-made equipment. Resultantly, the case dragged on and on for almost a year in the courts of law and was finally dismissed by a senior magistrate who described the lack of any substantive evidence by the police as resembling a circus. Working for or being associated with the award winning Radio VOP continues to be a great challenge to staff, management, trustees and all stakeholders. In June 2006 the station won the internationally acclaimed One World Media Award in London for its promotion of free speech and human rights thus brushing off stiff competition from other formidable electronic media that report from world flashpoints such as Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), among several others. It is also gratifying to know that one is providing vital and balanced information otherwise deliberately denied to its citizens. It is indeed a process of fiercely lobbying for the opening up of the airwaves so that Zimbabweans will one day celebrate the arrival of 'choice' in the electronic media through the availability of different privately-owned radio and television stations in the country!

John Masuku, a veteran broadcaster, is the Executive Director of Radio Voice of the People (VOP). He is contactable at: - jjwpmasuku@yahoo.com

Speaking for the voiceless

By Memory Kadau

The stench emanating from the tiny filthy cell had a paralysing effect. Human waste and sweat! I couldn't open my mouth either, as I could taste the sourness of the air inside the room. I felt as if my end was beginning. With my spinning head tucked in between my trembling feet, I began to lament on how my day had suddenly changed. I felt like a hot sword piercing through my stomach as a mixed bowl of fear, rage, resentment, betrayal, abuse started stirring in my mind. I felt I had lost everything, including my mind. This is more than hell, I concluded. I could not fathom such calamities ever befalling me. September 19, 2007 had relatively been an eventful day having spent a greater part of it at the NGO EXPO. Crisis Coalition had a stand at the NGO Expo and this opened an opportunity to meet with members of the public and educate them about human rights.

Who would have thought that a debate between two female Studio 263 (a local soap) actors with UZ former student leaders about human rights would result in the two ladies wanting to settle their own personal scores by sacrificing an innocent woman? Four hours after the heated argument the two ladies returned with three men in plain clothes from the Law and Order section. The men informed me that they wanted to question me about the contact details of the two guys who were already being accused of undermining the person of the President. The police officers confiscated all the remaining literature and the banner belonging to Crisis Coalition which were at the stand.

To my confusion what was initially meant to be a question and answer session led to my being detained in police cells. I was not informed of the reason for my detention. I was taken to a small, poorly lit office where I was subjected to harassment and intimidation. I was asked the same questions repeatedly, the question becoming louder and forceful in an attempt to extract a false statement from me. They wanted to know about Crisis Coalition funders, directors and operations of the organisation. They accused me of being used by the dubious people who form illegal NGOs being funded by the country's enemies and warned me to "stay away from politics" or otherwise risk death. A tall police officer identified as Sheila slapped me twice and accused me of having phoning my boyfriend instead of responding to her questions

After the interrogation, I found myself in a filthy and almost decomposing cell. The floor was logged with urine. For a moment I had difficulty in breathing. I squeezed myself into a less moist corner, as I was feeling so weak. There were 17 other women in the cell. Some were in for "illegal vending"; political demonstrations and one had allegedly dumped her newborn baby. The room presented a painful exhibit of mental torture. Mosquitoes and lice had a field day on me and I also felt some bugs crawling under my skin. As midnight approached some police officers came and herded us downstairs for a second roll call. I stumbled and fell in the ensuing commotion of shoving and pushing. Sharing filthy blankets, verbal and physical abuse is what should

be prepared to endure when thrown into police cells at Harare Central Police Station. In the early hours of dawn, after the series of roll calls eight officers summoned me to the Law and Order office for further interrogations. I was accused of exhibiting subversive material at the NGO Expo and writing statements which they deemed bent on undermining the integrity of the uniformed forces.

After spending 24 horrible hours in the filthy cells I was subsequently charged with being a public nuisance and released. It was only then that the reality of my experience and what I had gone through struck me. I cried and lamented the breakdown of law and order or rather lack of it and dehumanizing state of the police cells which are unfit for human habitation. As we drove away I closed my eyes and shut out the flashes of my torrid experience. The hours I spent in those cells felt like a lifetime.

Our rights are being violated. Women are forced to remove their undergarments and are denied the most basic of their rights, sanitary wear! The human rights situation in Zimbabwe is precarious to say the least. One can safely conclude that it is at best unavailable and at worst non-existent. Those tasked with enforcing the law virtually have no respect for law and order and care less about the safety of the citizens they are supposed to protect. I am fortunate that I have the voice to speak out against such human rights abuses. What about those who do not? What about those who just cry and mourn in silence and those who are silenced before they can even express themselves.

I will live to tell the tale

By Bright Chibvuri

SATURDAY the 3rd of March 2007 prominently noted in my diary as the day when I experienced the darkest side of President Robert Mugabe's brutal media laws. This was my third arrest in my 10-year career as a journalist since the introduction of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) in 2002. My first arrest was way back in 2003 when I was abducted by Zanu PF militias in my line of duty in the small town of Kadoma during a hotly contested by-election. After spending the night in a rundown bakery which was used as a torture chamber I was released the following morning in unclear circumstances.

The other incident was in 2005 when overzealous soldiers arrested me while taking photographs of their colleagues who were looting packets of sugar at a leading city supermarket. After failing to come up with a suitable charge, the police later forced me to pay a fine of Z\$25 000 for unlawfully taking pictures without permission. But two years down the line, I am now facing a real test case of which I will live to tell tale. The story will expose both the bureaucratic nature of our justice delivery system and the anguish that I have endured over 11 months at the time of writing this article.

On that fateful day, I was assigned by my employer, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) to cover a district restructuring meeting in the boarder town of Plumtree. I did not know that the events of that day would end up in a protracted legal case involving the state and myself. Every time I try to put my mind to the case, I fail to understand why it has taken so long to be concluded and why I was arrested in the first place. I vividly recall entering into a community hall where some trade unionists were meeting when my heart suddenly started pumping faster as I made eye contact with Mugabe's law enforcement agents. From the expressions on their faces I could tell that they up to no good.

The ZCTU had been granted relief by the High Court that none of its meetings should be disrupted by the police and this was one such meeting. I introduced myself as an employee of the ZCTU, working as a journalist for *The Worker* newspaper. The police officers suddenly became uneasy and the situation turned tense. You could read in their eyes that they had a lot of questions for me. They wanted to know why ZCTU was organising the meeting ahead of a planned massive job stayaway, codenamed *Operation Tatambura*. They also wanted to know what I was doing in this southwestern boarder town of Plumtree far from the madding crowds of Harare and Bulawayo. Something suddenly came into my mind, my press card had expired and I was waiting for a new one from the Media and Information Commission (MIC). I momentarily felt at ease though considering that I was not carrying out the duties of a journalist, but just observing the proceedings of a ZCTU closed door meeting. As the meeting progressed, I was given an opportunity to address the workers about the operations of *The Worker* newspaper. In my address, I urged participants to support the publication and that they were free to contribute articles to the newspaper. We exchanged contact details, took two shots of the

participants, using my digital camera.

That is when all hell broke loose. Before I could even say good-bye, one of the officers from the Law and Order section challenged me to produce my press card. I told him that my application for a new card was still pending at the MIC and even showed him my expired press card, to prove that I was indeed a genuine journalist. When I produced my expired press card, little did I know that the police officer would get excited. One of the officers contacted his bosses about my status and from the discussions I realised that I was in big trouble. Yes, I was indeed under arrest for contravening Section 83 of AIPPA which makes it an offence to practice journalism without accreditation. Like a sheep being led to the slaughter, I was force-marched to the police station, handcuffed. After vigorous interrogations by different officers who accused me of working for a private newspaper which was part of the regime change agenda, I was told that I had committed a serious offence of practicing without accreditation. I was also accused of masquerading as a journalist since my press card had already expired. For that matter I was to be locked for two days pending my court appearance on Monday the 5th of March 2007.

Sitting on a bench and awaiting their next move, the investigating officer suggested contacting officials from MIC to verify my accreditation status and it was confirmed that my application was indeed still pending. However, from the way the inquiry was made, the official from MIC who happened to be a junior officer was asked leading questions such as: “Good morning Sir, we have a journalist by the name Bright Chibvuri who has an expired press card. Is it correct that AIPPA says we should arrest him in that case? The conversation went on and on and each time I realized that the officer did not want to entertain the fact that I had lodged my application with the MIC, and that as was the case with several other journalists, my application was being processed.

At the end of this short conversation the police officer said: “Look, Guys from MIC said we must arrest you and my friend this is the position.” My conclusion was that the officer was keen to have me arrested and was under pressure from his bosses not to treat the offence I had 'committed' lightly. I requested, in fact begged the police officer to contact my wife Selina and colleagues at my workplace to inform them about my arrest and within no time I got a response that lawyers had been alerted about my situation.

But since it was a Saturday my lawyers could only have access to me the next Monday. So for two days and two nights I was to be the guest of the State. A docket was opened and finger prints taken. I was pushed and shoved and insults hurled at me like I was common criminal. I remember one of the police recruits saying people like me must be jailed because I was a mercenary working with the British to derail the gains of independence. After all the arresting formalities were completed, it was time to go to our 'hotel' rooms. As a newcomer I was shocked when we were served with a light dinner of sadza (thick maize meal porridge) and water with salt. I was hungry and dehydrated but could not partake this meal. To my surprise my inmates were made a stampede for the substandard meal. One of them actually said the food in question was much better compared to what they had been served the previous night - boiled maize grain and sugar. I kindly requested one of the officers to buy me something since I had

money which I had surrendered upon my arrest together with my other belongings. Of course they agreed because the officer would demand a 'cut' for that. Within an hour I received my packed lunch which I shared with five other inmates some of whom had spent more than four nights in the cells.

We were locked in our cells for the night. The cells were filthy and a heavy smell of urine filled the small concrete-floor room. The jokes and stories shared among inmates kept my spirits high. We were a mixed bag of criminals in the cells. Some were rapists, cash barons, carjackers and buglers. At midnight I heard my name being called out and I was terrified. The duty officers said I had some visitors and I became jelly-kneed. When I went out I saw two men and a tiny woman waiting for me. One of the men said they were from the President's Office and they wanted to know why I was in Plumtree. I told them my story which they did not believe and another round of interrogation ensued. They promised to be in touch and then disappeared into the night.

Monday, the 5th of March, after having 'breakfast' it was time to go to court. I had earlier signed a warned and cautioned statement the previous day and out of fear and the desire to be freed, I had admitted to the charge of operating without a valid press card. I was relieved when I learnt that a lawyer had been engaged to represent me. My case is still pending at the Plumtree Magistrates Court, where I am still facing charges under AIPPA. At the time of writing this article, I had appeared in court on eight occasions and the case had been widely publicised in both the public, private and online media organisations. The State seems determined to nail me. I, however, derive a lot of confidence from my defence team of Munyaradzi Nzarayapenga and MISA-Zimbabwe Legal Officer Wilbert Mandinde both of whom have fought hard to ensure that at the end of it all justice will prevail.