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Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
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Election Watch 2013-14

CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

Parties agree on new constitution



NEWS of Zimbabwe's coalition principals resolving all outstanding issues that had stalled the controversial constitution-making process made headlines in all the media this month.

The principals reportedly reached an agreement on January 17th after receiving a report from the Cabinet committee tasked with resolving the contentious issues, paving the way for the completion of the new constitution.

Although the state-owned print media also provided details on how the contentious issues were resolved, they failed to provide a critical analysis of the implications of the resolutions.

Among them was the decision to postpone the introduction of presidential running-mates by 10 years and the staffing of the proposed Constitutional Court by seven years; that the Peace and Reconciliation Commission would be operational for only 10 years; that the President would retain executive powers; and that reform of the Attorney-General's Office, among other issues, would be handled by the winner of the presidential election race (*The Herald* and *The Sunday Mail*, 19 & 27/1).

However, *NewsDay* (19/1) viewed ZANU PF as having made **"a huge climbdown"** by **"giving up on virtually all their demands"**, including its opposition to devolution; dual citizenship; reform of the Attorney-General's Office and the creation of the National Prosecuting Authority.

Contrary to state print media reports, *NewsDay* and *The Daily News* (19/1) reported ZANU PF as having agreed to have presidential powers diluted, citing Constitutional and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Eric Matinenga. Matinenga said although the executive powers of the president would be acknowledged in the new draft; most of them were set to be clipped and he/she would have to consult Parliament and Cabinet on major decisions, including declaring war.

However, the *Daily News* (25/1) argued that while the draft whittles down presidential powers significantly, it still represented **"a triumph for Mugabe"** because the draft **"defers key changes for five to 10 years"** after the adoption of the new constitution.

Similarly, *NewsDay*, *The Zimbabwe Mail.com* and *Daily News On Sunday* (21, 23 & 27/1) reported the deferment of presidential running mates as a way of helping President Mugabe and, to some extent, Prime Minister Tsvangirai to manage their parties' **"explosive"** succession issues.

While all the media agreed that the final draft was a political compromise and that it was not perfect, they maintained that the draft was a **"giant leap"** in efforts to democratize the country (*NewsDay*, 21/1).

Parties trade barbs over voter registration

CLAIMS that Prime Minister Tsvangirai had come under fire for failing to honour his pledge to ensure Treasury releases US\$21 million needed for voter registration were the highlight of the media's coverage of Zimbabwe's election administration issues in recent weeks.

The accusations were triggered by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission's failure to kick-start a countrywide voter-awareness and registration campaign on January 3rd after Treasury reportedly failed to provide money to the commission.

The Herald (5/1) reported Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa saying there was no money for ZEC to conduct the exercise despite assurances from Tsvangirai that he was "pushing" for the release of the funds. The PM reportedly made the pledge during two meetings with the commission last December.

However, Tsvangirai's spokesman William Bango told the same paper that it was not the PM's duty to look for money for national processes: ***"The Prime Minister, as a member of the executive, does not conduct voter registration. What he was only doing in those meetings was to buttress a process where an independent electoral body could have the capacity to carry out its mandate"***.

The Herald (5/1) did not ask Chinamasa to explain when exactly the process would start; how government was expecting to raise the money; and the implications of poor funding on the smooth running of Zimbabwe's elections.

Instead, the state-owned daily passively reported the minister saying voter education would begin after Treasury had released the money; that government had revised the figure it required for the programme from US\$32 million to US\$21 million; and that ZEC also needed money to meet conditions of service for the commissioners, who reportedly did not even have vehicles to execute their duties.

Chinamasa also told *The Herald* that no voter registration and voting facilities would be extended to people in the Diaspora and that Zimbabwe was the only country implementing the SADC guidelines on elections adopted in 2004. He declared: ***“Our experience is that towards elections, those people who fear defeat would want to find fault in the (electoral) system but we will not waste our time looking at such drawbacks”.***

Reports on voter education and registration constituted 54% (32 reports) of the 59 stories the media carried on the management of Zimbabwe’s elections.

The remaining 27 were on general electoral issues, such as the resignation of Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission chairman Reginald Austin; the endorsement of a code of conduct for the Organ on National Healing and Reconciliation that will see political parties being held accountable for their supporters’ violent conduct; proposed amendments to laws that impinge on Zimbabwe’s ability to hold democratic elections, like the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) and the Public Order and Security (POSA); and the police’s expression of readiness for the polls.

PARTY ACTIVITIES

Media report divisions in parties

AS Zimbabwe draws closer to general elections, expected sometime this year, the media reported rising tensions in the country's major parties, with candidates jostling for the right to represent their parties in the polls.

The media carried 87 reports on the activities of these parties. Forty-seven (54%) of them appeared in the private media, while the remaining 40 featured in the state-owned media.

Of the 40 stories that appeared in the official state media, twenty-eight (70%) were on ZANU PF. The remaining 12 were shared between Prime Minister Tsvangirai's MDC (nine) and the smaller MDC formation, led by Industry Minister Welshman Ncube (three).

Twenty-two (79%) of the 28 reports on ZANU PF were positive, while the remaining six were neutral. The government media's reports on ZANU PF downplayed allegations of corruption and infighting in the party, while portraying the party's policies, such as indigenization and land reform as an overwhelming success.

These sentiments were contained in reports with headlines such as: *Freedom fighters cannot be separated from ZANU PF: Sibanda* (*The Herald*, 9/1), *Bulawayo urged to vote for ZANU PF* (*The Herald*, 28/1), *Politburo to discuss Constitution-making* (*The Herald*, 8/1), *West hails Zim land reform* (*The Herald*, 25/1), *ZANU PF urged to ensure members register to vote* (*The Herald*, 15/1), and *ZANU PF Manicaland urged to unite* (*The Herald*, 11/1).

In contrast, the official state media's 12 reports on the two MDC groups sought to prove their long-held notion that these parties were appendages of the West; lacked consistency and direction; and were riddled with factionalism.

This was reflected in reports with headlines such as: *Furore over MDC-T poll conditions* and, *MDC-T divided over Moyo's replacement* (*The Herald*, 10/1), *Cross spills MDC-T anarchy plot* (*The Sunday Mail*, 6/1), *MDC-T fears hearings could split party* (*The Sunday Mail*, 27/1), *Ex-MDC legislators' careers in limbo* (*The Herald*, 7/1), *MDC-T councillors in tender row* (*The Herald*, 14/1) and *Biti tells off West* (*The Herald*, 11/1).

But the private media reported ZANU PF as also battling similar problems.

In one such case, *NewsDay* (28/1) reported senior ZANU PF officials in Matabeleland, such as Angeline Masuku and Sikhanyiso Ndlovu, castigating fellow Politburo members, Ignatius Chombo and Saviour Kasukuwere, for driving into Bulawayo and addressing a campaign rally, while other party members were attending a memorial service for the late Vice President John Nkomo in the city.

Chombo and Kasukuwere addressed a campaign rally at Stanley Hall on January 27th despite having reportedly been advised to postpone it.

Addressing party members at Nkomo's Worringham home, Ndlovu said: ***"To have a big event like this where you bring Cabinet ministers from other provinces yet we do not know about it is disappointing. These people should not come and practice their cultures in our province. They should leave that in their provinces. Let us focus on building the party and let us not be fooled by Cabinet ministers who come here promising you different things yet they are not assured they will be ministers after the elections"***.

RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Abuses continue despite Mugabe's appeal

ALL the media reported President Mugabe urging Zimbabweans to desist from violence, as the country heads for elections.

Mugabe made this appeal while addressing mourners at the burial of Vice President John Nkomo at the National Heroes Acre in Harare (ZBC, 21/1, 8pm and *The Herald*, 22/1).

Earlier, the media reported Chief Justice Godfrey Chidyausiku expressing similar sentiments in his speech to mark the official opening of the High Court's legal year (ZBC, 14/1, 8pm and *The Herald*, 15/1).

The media recorded 20 incidents of rights violations in the period under review, 17 (85%) of which appeared in the private media. The remaining three featured in the official state media.

Here is a selection of some of them:

- A KweKwe-based terror group, *Al-Shabab*, forced a meeting convened by the Centre for Community Development in Zimbabwe to discuss the final draft constitution to be abandoned (SW Radio Africa, 31/1). Earlier (25/1), the same station reported police in Marondera as having banned another CCDZ meeting, claiming that the meeting was ***"political"***. They cited the presence of former ZANU PF official Tracy Mutinhiri who crossed the floor and joined the MDC-T last year.
- That ZANU PF officials in Mberengwa were targeting village heads and traditional leaders, demanding lists of all the residents under their jurisdiction and a breakdown of what political party they support; and that the party's youths in Chegutu were threatening residents for supporting the MDC-T (SW Radio Africa, 24/1), and
- The arrest of ZimRights director Okay Machisa on charges of conspiracy to commit fraud. Machisa was accused of being involved in ***"illegal"*** voter registration and publishing false statements with the intention of inciting public disorder and violence (Studio 7 & SW Radio Africa, 14/1).

What they said...

"Let us carry that message with us in our daily lives. It was his dear wish to see elections, which are scheduled for this year, carry this exhortation of peace, peace and more peace. For it is one way we could honour his legacy and that of others who fought for this country in order to make it the peaceful and tranquil oasis we have today" - President Mugabe addressing mourners at the burial of Vice President John Nkomo at the National Heroes Acre in Harare (*The Herald*, 22/1).

"We in the judiciary also note that the nation may go to the polls this year. As the nation gears itself up for the elections, we add our voice to those who are calling for free and fair elections that are held in a violence-free atmosphere" – Chief Justice Godfrey Chidyausiku officially opening the 2013 legal year of the High Court (*The Herald*, 15/1).

"We are waiting for money and we are ready to roll... We have been told that the money is there but we don't know what is delaying its release. We have to go out with our teams to publicise the event a week before actual registration takes place. Surprisingly, the US\$1 million earmarked for that has not been released to ZEC. We are frustrated..." - ZEC acting chairperson Joyce Kazembe (*The Herald*, 11/1).

"When you vote, choose ZANU-PF - the people who have your concerns at heart. You might think that being a councillor is nothing, but it is in the council where all the developmental decisions are made. MDC councillors are awarding themselves tenders and spending ratepayers' money. My hair has grown grey because of fighting with MDC on a daily basis" – Local Government Minister Ignatius Chombo addressing ZANU PF supporters at a Stanley Square rally in Bulawayo (*The Herald*, 28/1).

"This is the beginning of revival of our party and Bulawayo. We do not want MDC in Bulawayo anymore and we want to run it over. You people of Bulawayo should start that fight today. We must stand up and vote ZANU PF to reclaim our position in the city and you would get everything that you want. Factories have closed and MDC is always calling for change. What change have they brought besides short-changing Bulawayo?" – ZANU PF's secretary for Indigenization Saviour Kasukuwere speaking at the same rally (*The Herald*, 28/1).

"Chombo is abusing his powers and behaving like a CEO of council who can appoint councillors anytime he deems necessary. He should be reminded that he is a mere policymaker and should not rule by intimidation" - MDC Bulawayo provincial spokesman Edwin Ndlovu responding to Chombo's threat to fire Bulawayo town clerk Middleton Nyoni for defying his directive to appoint Fidelis Fengu a special interest councillor (*NewsDay*, 30/1).

“Compromises were made in the interest, and for the mutual preservation of the GPA parties. Deferment of implementation of new provisions by ten years is clearly aimed at taking care of particular persons...what was conceived as a key national development initiative, an anchor for the future direction of our country and its citizens, has been reduced to a political expedient for the benefit of a handful, maybe just two individuals...” – Mavambo president Simba Makoni attacking coalition principals for personalizing Zimbabwe’s constitution-making process to suit themselves and their parties at the expense of the people (ZimEye.com, 24/1).

“We are appalled by the cowardice and pliancy of Copac and the whole Parliament in abdicating from their responsibility to produce a draft constitution, and put it to the people of Zimbabwe. We condemn, in the strongest terms, that national resources were expended in an exercise aimed primarily at allaying the fears and concerns, and advancing the aspirations of the GPA political parties” – Simba Makoni (The Zimbabwe Mail.com, 23/1).

“It (Makoni’s criticism) is not surprising. He does not have people and does not have any responsibility, so what should we expect from him? What else does he want? Which people is he talking about? What is he representing? He represents nothing but himself and I don’t think he has any support at all to talk about...” - ZANU PF spokesman Rugare Gumbo (New Zimbabwe.com, 24/1).

“Citizens should be given an opportunity to understand the draft, debate it and make choices based on information and awareness of the contents of the constitution. The constitution is for Zimbabweans and they need to be prioritized in these processes. The draft has to be translated and summarized into content that is accessible and understandable to citizens to enable informed choices at the referendum” - The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) expressing reservations about the lack of public input in Zimbabwe’s constitution making process (SW Radio Africa, 18/1).

Ends/

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