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**Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe**  
**Friday February 1<sup>st</sup> – Thursday February 28<sup>th</sup> 2013**  
**Election Watch 2013-15**

## **RIGHTS ABUSES**

# **Media fails to resolve 'mystery' of Maisiri's death**

THE death of 12-year old Christpowers Maisiri on February 23<sup>rd</sup> in a suspected case of political violence in Headlands reignited debate in the media about Zimbabwe's ability to hold free and fair elections later this year.

It also triggered a war of words between Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC and ZANU PF about whether the incident was politically motivated; with both parties claiming that the Maisiri family belonged to them (*Daily News*, 25/2).

The private media, particularly the *Daily News* (25/2), rushed to conclude that ZANU PF was responsible, mostly on the strength of accounts by the MDC-T and the Maisiri family.

On the other hand, ZBC (26/2, 8pm) and *The Herald* (27 & 28/2) reported Maisiri's death after three days, in the context of President Mugabe expressing concern over the boy's death but dismissing accusations that his party was responsible, saying they were "**baseless, offensive and malicious**". These media also gave prominence to "preliminary police investigations" "ruling out foul play" (*The Herald*, 28/2 and ZBC, 28/2, 8pm).

Subsequently, none of the media independently investigated what exactly transpired.

*The Herald* (27/2) reported Mugabe's statement, delivered through his spokesman George Charamba, expressing concern over the "**emergence of violence in some parts of the country**" and "**ordering**" the police to "**arrest all perpetrators of political violence regardless of their social standing**".

The official daily appeared to trivialize the prevalence and implications of the current wave of political violence and harassment by describing these as **“reports of isolated cases of political skirmishes”** in Mashonaland West and Headlands.

The *Daily News* (25/2) was the first to report a bizarre claim by ZANU PF’s secretary for administration, Didymus Mutasa, saying that it was “impossible” for his party’s activists to kill Christpowers, because his father was a ZANU PF supporter (*Daily News*, 25/2). **“Yes, I know Maisiri. But there’s no way he can contest against me when he is a member of my party. Yes, he comes from Chief Makoni’s area...but he is not an MDC supporter.”**

The paper had contacted Mutasa as the current MP for the district after Maisiri and the MDC-T had accused ZANU PF of being linked to Christpowers’ death. But the daily also reported the Maisiri family claiming they had been the victim of several previous incidents of political violence, which they blamed on ZANU PF.

Two days later, *The Herald* (27/2) appeared to reinforce Mutasa’s claims by quoting ZANU PF spokesman Rugare Gumbo saying his party could not have attacked the Maisiri family because of **“the existence of a cordial relationship”** between the two. Gumbo said his party believed the incident, like others before it, **“was staged to try to put Zimbabwe on the international spotlight with a view to discrediting what is now an imminent and inevitable ZANU PF victory in the coming elections”**.

Earlier, *The Herald* (26/2) downplayed an incident of ZANU PF intra-party violence in Hurungwe West and failed to disclose the political affiliation of two senior ZANU PF officials involved. The daily simply reported **“businessman”** Temba Mliswa as having been arrested **“following skirmishes”** where Hurungwe East legislator Sarah Mahoka **“was injured in an attack by youths, while trying to address a meeting”** at Zimoja Business Centre.

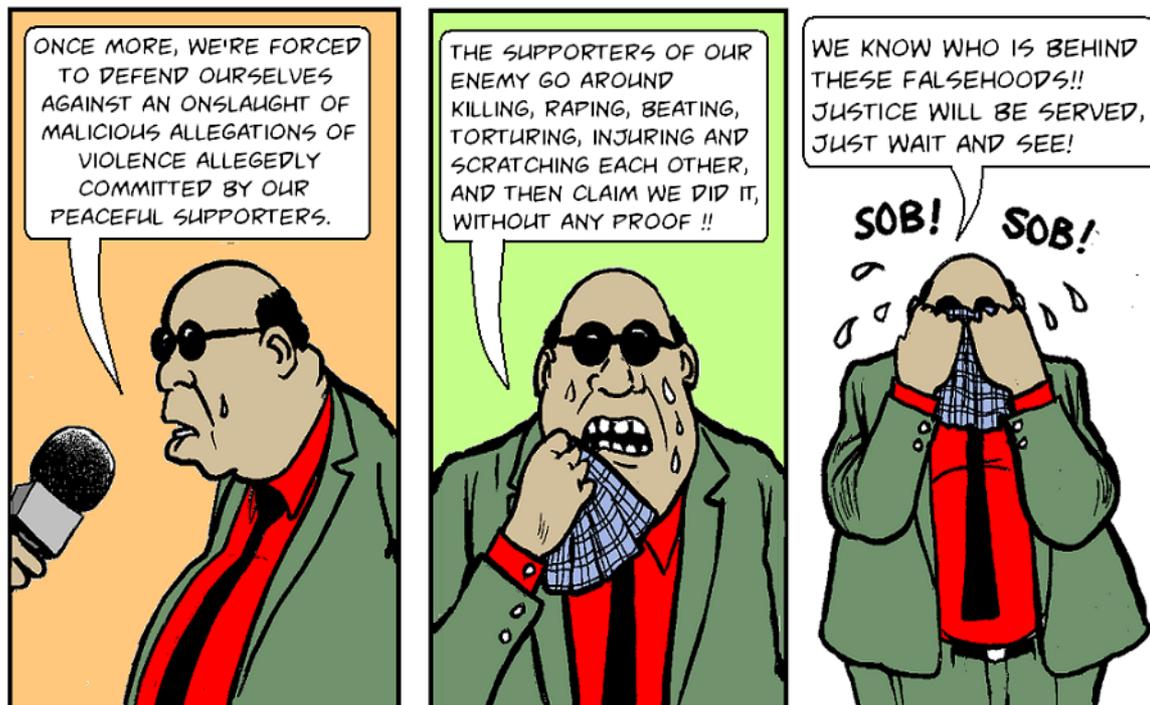
In another case, *The Herald* (28/2) reported a court appearance of five MDC-T youths from Chitungwiza who allegedly **“tore posters”** of Mugabe and late nationalist Solomon Mujuru before **“beating up”** ZANU PF youths **“in politically-inspired violence”**. *The Herald* did not explain why the MDC-T activists were only charged with **“disorderly conduct”** when the paper had claimed they assaulted ZANU PF supporters.

## HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

These incidents (above) were among the 22 cases of rights violations the media reported.

Of these, 17 appeared in the private media, while the remaining five were contained in the official state media.

But most of these incidents (13) were on what has been described as a renewed crackdown on civic organizations by the police and ZANU PF against perceived critics of the ZANU PF arm of government.



## Media gives mixed coverage to 'Vote Yes' campaign

THE nationwide awareness exercise on the draft constitution by the Constitutional Parliamentary Select Committee (Copac) and a campaign by the coalition parties for Zimbabweans to vote for the draft in the forthcoming referendum, were the highlights of Zimbabwe's constitution-making process.

The official state media mostly promoted Copac's awareness activities and the 'Yes Vote' campaign.

But the state media gave less coverage to those with reservations about the draft, or who were totally opposed to it, as well as Copac's awareness exercise, and the timing of the referendum. Civic groups, such as the National Constitution Assembly (NCA), Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and Veritas, were organizations that raised reservations, as well as political parties, such as Mavambo and ZAPU.

While some of the private media joined the parties in the 'Vote Yes' campaign, believing the draft was a significant step towards democratizing Zimbabwe, they remained cautious about government's ability to raise sufficient funds to conduct a credible referendum in a short period of time (*Financial Gazette*, 21/2).

These media also gave widespread publicity to objections, firstly by the NCA, and later by other civic organizations and some political parties. The basis of their objections was that the principals did not consult the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) in setting March 16 as the date for the referendum, which ZEC reportedly confirmed (*Veritas' Constitutional Watch*, 6/3). And the smaller MDC formation, led by Industry Minister Welshman Ncube was reported complaining that it was not consulted at all (*Gazette*, 21/2).

The private media reported civic groups and political parties stressing that the March 16 date was too soon, a concern Constitutional Affairs Minister Eric Matinenga apparently shared; that ZEC did not seem to be ready for the vote; and that there was need to allow Zimbabweans more time to learn about the draft in order to make informed decisions (ZiFM, 15 & 18/2 and *Veritas' Constitutional Watch*, 6/3).

These reservations were also the basis of a High Court application by the NCA, seeking to set aside President Mugabe's referendum proclamation and to extend the period by at least two months.

To its credit, Copac ensured that all the main newspapers, both government and privately owned, carried full texts of the draft constitution and the venues and times of its awareness programmes around the country. The Select Committee was also reported to have distributed a further 90,000 copies of the draft, 70,000 in English and 20,000 in vernacular languages.

And as this report was being completed ZEC issued a 40-page supplement listing all 9,449 polling stations for next Saturday's referendum in all the private newspapers on Friday (7/3). Whether this list reaches rural communities in time for the poll remains an issue.

## **PARTY ACTIVITIES**

# **Mugabe's birthday swamps state media reports on parties' activities**

REPORTS on President Mugabe's 89<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations flooded the official print media's pages and the news bulletins and current affairs programmes on the national broadcaster, ZBC, towards the end of the month.

Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC began to receive significant coverage during the same period because of its 'Yes Vote' campaign for the draft constitution.

Of the 71 reports the official state media carried, 49 (58%) were on ZANU PF's activities. Fifteen (23%) were on Prime Minister Tsvangirai's MDC, while four were on the other MDC formation, led by Industry Minister Welshman Ncube. The remaining three were on smaller parties, such as Mavambo, Ndonga and ZAPU.

The state media's coverage of ZANU PF was exclusively positive, while its coverage of the MDC-T, MDC-N and Ndonga was only positive in reports in which the party was reported urging Zimbabweans to 'Vote Yes' for the draft.

Mavambo appeared to have lost favour in the public (state) media for criticising the draft and the timing of the referendum.

Of the 49 stories the state media carried on ZANU PF, 17 were on Mugabe's birthday.

Highlight of the coverage of Mugabe's birthday included a series of Mugabe's traditional birthday interviews with ZBC, which were broadcast on February 28<sup>th</sup> and rebroadcast later; current affairs programmes featuring members of the 21<sup>st</sup> February Movement organizing committee; features of Mugabe dating back to his contribution to the liberation of Zimbabwe; the Bob Super Cup; congratulatory messages; and entire supplements devoted to him in the state Press.

Twelve stories were on ZANU PF's 'Vote Yes' campaign, while four were on senior party officials, such as Mugabe and Defence Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa, who were reported making partisan political statements at government functions.

In one case, Mnangagwa was reported ruling out any reform of Zimbabwe's national security sector despite the fact that it is provided for under the Global Political Agreement (GPA), and justifying military involvement in national politics.

Addressing officers attending the Joint Command and Staff Course Number 26 in Harare, Mnangagwa said: ***"Security sector reforms, what does that mean? To have NGOs operating defence forces? Trade unions operating defence forces? No!"*** (ZTV, 4/2, 8pm).

He added: ***"You cannot divorce the role of the ZDF from indigenization. The law intends to develop people economically and ZDF is there to defend the country's sovereignty and natural resources. We are a product of the revolution and before we go we should make sure that we empower our people economically"*** (ZTV, 4/2, 8pm).

The remaining 16 were on the deaths of people related to senior ZANU PF officials. Apart from being given too much prominence, these deaths were presented as being of national significance. They included the death of Information Minister Webster Shamu's mother, Mbuya Shamu, and Abigail Mutevera, the wife to late CIO director-general Elias Mutevera (ZBC, 11/2, 8pm).

The private media carried 48 stories on the activities of Zimbabwe's main parties.

Of these, 20 were on ZANU PF. Seventeen were on the MDC-T, and seven on the MDC-N. The remaining four were on other, smaller parties, such as Mavambo, ZAPU and Ndonga.

## **What they said...**

***“The distributors and recipients (of short wave portable radios) stand warned that the ZRP will not tolerate any such chicanery. We strongly believe that the intentions of such people (distributors) are not holy but mean to create and sow seeds of disharmony within the county, especially now that the country is about to embark on the referendum and harmonized elections”*** – ZRP spokeswoman Assist. Commissioner Charity Charamba warning NGOs against distributing portable radios in rural area, and villagers not to accept them (*Daily News*, 20/3).

***“Some are taking advantage of needy communities under the guise of helping them...We will not stand akimbo while unpatriotic elements within us engage in activities aimed at fermenting sentiments of violence among peace-loving Zimbabweans”*** – ZRP spokeswoman Charity Charamba (*Daily News*, 20/2).

***“It is not about the type of gadgets but it is about how they have been entering the country and the motive behind that. What we do is to look at the legal provisions on how NGOs must operate and every time an NGO goes out of that framework the police are bound to act. Whenever we are convinced that some NGOs are up to no good we definitely act...”*** - Deputy Commissioner-General Innocent Matibiri said this when he appeared before the Portfolio Committee on Defence and Home Affairs to appraise it on the police's state of preparedness ahead of the constitutional referendum and harmonized elections (*The Herald*, 26/2).

***“Do not do nefarious activities and should they do that and venture into areas not contained in their constitution, they must have themselves to blame and not the police”*** – Police Commissioner-General Augustine Chihuri warning non-governmental organizations and civic groups to desist from “nefarious activities” that threaten the security of the country. Chihuri was speaking at a pass-out parade of police officers in Harare (*The Herald*, 25/2).

**“...Political tensions are rising again. What’s disturbing are incidents of harassment, arrest, unlawful detention and office raids of civic society members, countrywide”** - Labour Minister Paurina Mpariwa expressing concern over police clampdown on civil society organizations (*Daily News*, 11/2).

**“There is no need to throw our hands in the air because we have been victimized or intimidated. There will always be people like that; people who want to frustrate the process that we are working on. We have to soldier on. Mugabe has told me he is shocked that the behaviour of some of his officials shows they never wanted the coalition government”** - Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai speaking after listening to complaints from civil society leaders at Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition offices in Harare (*Daily News*, 15/2).

**“Holding an MDC-T party card is tantamount to holding a brick to build Sodom and Gomorrah. I am surprised that you allow MDC-T party cardholders in your churches. Since when has Satan worshipped God?”** - War veterans’ leader Jabulani Sibanda addressing church and traditional leaders, business people and ZANU PF supporters at Mubaira growth point in Mhondoro (*NewsDay*, 13/2).

**“As traditional leaders, you should make sure that you don’t have anyone with MDC-T cards in your areas...We should work hard to ensure that we restore the country from the MDC-T. They don’t believe in our own God, but in Satan. I am shocked there are pastors who are in MDC-T structures”** – Jabulani Sibanda (*NewsDay*, 11/2).

**“This tragic death presents an opportunity to the Government of Zimbabwe and the Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee (Jomic), which are responsible in part for creating and promoting an atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding between the political parties, to demonstrate their commitment to justice by swiftly and professionally investigating the circumstances that led to the death of this child”** - US Embassy expressing concern over Christpowers’ death (*Nehandaradio.com*, 25/2).

**“As Zimbabwe brings its Global Political Agreement to an end, non-partisan, efficient, and professional law enforcement is critical to gaining the confidence of the Zimbabwean people, neighbouring countries, and the international community. Respect for the rule of law and apolitical policing are also essential for creating the conditions for credible and non-violent Zimbabwean elections later this year”** - US Embassy extending its condolences to the Maisiri family (*Nehandaradio.com*, 25/2).

Ends/

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