



Defending free expression and your right to know

Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
Tuesday May 1st – Thursday May 31st 2012
Election Watch 2012-6

TOP STORY

State media distort UN rights chief's findings

THE official visit by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navanethem Pillay to assess Zimbabwe's human rights situation ahead of anticipated elections – the first of its kind by a UN human rights commissioner – was the most significant political development in the media in a busy month.

Pillay held a Press conference in Harare at the end of her historic five-day visit on Africa Day, May 25th, during which she made damning observations about Zimbabwe's human rights record and its democratisation process since the formation of the inclusive government in February 2009.

Her concerns hinged on the continued existence of various forms of repression, persecution and the lack of respect for the rights and freedoms of Zimbabwean citizens.

These undemocratic tendencies included the **“misuse”** of legislation by state security agents for **“political purposes”**; the involvement of the military in the country's civilian political affairs; the persecution of human rights defenders, journalists and political opponents on frivolous grounds; discrimination and criminalization of minorities, such as gays and lesbians; the **“strong political bias”** of the state media and these media's systematic denigration of human rights defenders **“simply going about their job of trying to help promote and protect the human rights of ordinary Zimbabweans”**; and the reluctance by the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe to open up the airwaves to private players.

While the media reported on Pillay's Press conference, this was mostly in a selective and fragmented fashion. There was no attempt to give their audiences a holistic, point-by-point summary of the issues she raised in the full context of the country's socio-political crisis.

The state media particularly, failed to report her comments in context by failing to present the facts in a fair and balanced manner. Instead, they censored a number of Pillay's observations, including her advice to bring those responsible for serious political violence to justice, the state media's bias and the need for genuine media reforms, among other issues, and deliberately distorted her positive comments about Zimbabwe's existing "legal framework" as an **"admission"** that endorsed President Mugabe's demand for elections this year with or without a new constitution (*The Sunday Mail*, 27/5).

Other state media also paraded her call on the international community to lift sanctions against a small selection of individuals and Zimbabwean companies at the expense of her condemnation of several issues relating to Zimbabwe's human rights record.

The Herald (26/5), for example, tried to obfuscate Pillay's unflattering observations on the country's democratic processes by giving prominence to a **"lot of positives"** the country had achieved in such fields as women's rights, the acquisition of land by **"many small farmers"** under land reform, economic stability and government plans to ratify the international Convention Against Torture and Inhuman Treatment.

Even then, the full picture on the "positives" was not totally captured as the story selectively reported these and omitted crucial qualifying statements Pillay also made.

For example, despite reporting Pillay as expressing satisfaction that many small farmers had been given land, they censored her concerns over how the land reform process had **"also caused a great deal of misery, not just to former owners evicted without due process or compensation, but also to tens of thousands of farm workers who lost their jobs...and in many cases were reduced to total destitution overnight"**.

There was no mention either of her recommendations for land reform to be conducted **"transparently and with clear criteria that are in full accordance with international norms and standards"**, saying: **"There is, after all, no merit in taking sizable quantities of land from one elite, only to give it another. Under the GPA, the parties also agreed to ensure that all eligible citizens who want to have land can do so, and that each individual will be considered without bias. I urge the Inclusive Government to take further steps to carry out these and other key reforms laid down in the GPA."**

Similarly, *The Sunday Mail* (27/5) used unidentified “analysts” who claimed that Pillay ***“shocked many when she called for political reforms, which are not part of her human rights remit”***, in what the paper said was an ***“unmistakable if not embarrassing echo of the election manifestoes of the two MDC formations and their US, UK and EU donors which seek regime change in Zimbabwe”***.

One of the “analysts” who were identified, ZANU PF’s Jonathan Moyo, was reported saying: ***“While Pillay’s Friday Press statement was full of understandable but misplaced sentiments of those who help her pay her bills and whose malicious agenda against our country is now public knowledge, it is notable that she tried to safeguard her integrity by acknowledging that the Constitution of Zimbabwe contains internationally sound provisions for holding free and fair elections but that the challenge is only with the proper implementation of those provisions”***.

Instead of reporting Pillay’s statement in its own right, *The Herald* report of the following day (26/5) only did so in the context of Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa dismissing her observations as ***“off the mark”*** and ***“unfair”***.

The private media’s coverage of Pillay’s visit and her Press statement was more informative, though they too failed to provide a succinct summary of her critical Friday statement that included advice to establish a truth and reconciliation commission.

State media propaganda ignores Copac clarifications



DESPITE airing a current affairs programme in which Copac officials were featured clarifying several 'contentious' issues regarding the rewriting of the country's constitution, the national broadcaster, ZBC, continued to mislead its audiences on the exact national position on these matters in its news bulletins.

In recent months, ZBC and the other public media have dramatically transformed themselves into propaganda weapons to discredit the constitutional draft ahead of a referendum, narrowly defending and disseminating ZANU PF's ideology on the so-called contentious issues, while shutting out all other views.

In one such article, *Herald* columnist Isidore Guvamombe claimed: ***"Copac is feeding on our humanism, feasting on our dignity, defecating on the graves of our ancestors, fouling our history, shattering our hopes and destroying our future. In the end, we will have a Constitution that will make us, a people lighter than the smallest piece of paper"*** (10/5).

However, on May 17th, ZTV presented two Copac co-chairpersons Paul Mangwana and Douglas Mwonzora in its regular current affairs programme, *Constitutional Update*, setting the record straight on a number of contentious issues in its draft. These included homosexuality, devolution of power, dual citizenship, and the role of the UNDP in the constitution-making process.

For the record we list some of Copac's clarifications:

a) Gay Rights

Mwonzora refuted claims that the draft contained a clause promoting gay rights: ***"The draft does not contain rights of gays and lesbians. It does not recognize homosexuality at all...It defines marriage as a union between people of the opposite sex. We have been surprised by some members of the media and these so-called political commentators that are interpreting circumstances of birth as meaning homosexuality. Circumstances of birth is not the same as sexual orientation"***.

b) Devolution

Mangwana dismissed allegations that Zimbabweans had rejected devolution during Copac's outreach programme and that devolution was a foreign idea: ***"The issue of devolution is part of the principles we (coalition parties) agreed as to guide the new constitution, it is an agreed concept. What is not agreed is basically the composition of all provincial councils rather than the concept of devolution itself"***.

c) On alleged rifts within Copac

Contrary to claims that ZANU PF representatives in Copac had ***"disowned"*** the draft, Mwonzora said all members of Copac's management committee had ***"accepted"*** the document and ***"agreed that the draft as it stood should be handed over to the coalition principals and that was done"***.

d) On allegations of the UNDP's interference

Mangwana expressed concern over what he viewed as ***"unfair criticism on the involvement of the UNDP"***, saying the world body was not ***"interfering"*** with drafting the new constitution. He said the UNDP was only ***"a conduit through which various donors put resources for the process so that Copac does not have direct interface with individual donors"***.

In addition, Mwonzora and Mangwana accused ***"some people in the Press"*** of being ***"bent on misleading the people of Zimbabwe"*** about the draft, in an apparent reference to a coterie of columnists and commentators in the state media whose common agenda seems exclusively anchored in pre-empting the work of the Copac drafters.

Said Mwonzora: ***“The people who are spreading this misinformation have one common denominator – they were part and parcel of a process that failed and probably also want this one to fail. They are people who will benefit from the subsequent political crisis...”***

Mangwana concurred: ***“The mischief-makers fear the stability of Zimbabwe. I have called them messengers of the devil. What is interesting...is that they have no facts...They have not come up with a single clause and substantiated it...”***

Instead of giving proper balance and context in their reports by factoring in Copac’s clarifications, ZBC and the state press continued to run stories that projected the draft as promoting homosexuality; ignored the views of Zimbabweans; and was designed to remove President Mugabe and his party from government. No evidence supporting these claims was given.

ZTV in particular, continued to present its pro-ZANU PF commentators in other current affairs programmes, such as *Zvavanhu* (For Black People) and *African Pride*, whose discourse is evidently intended to counter Copac’s explanations through its current affairs programme.

In one such case, Vimbai Chivaura claimed: ***“The...so-called people-driven constitution seems to bring in foreigners who will turn Zimbabwe into an arena where our children are free to sodomize each other”*** (*African Pride*, 17/5).

This propaganda onslaught was evident in all 81 stories the official state media carried.

The private media carried 59 reports on Zimbabwe’s constitution-making process. Although these were mostly balanced, they failed to report the content of Copac’s current affairs programme.

Chinamasa defends military interference in politics



DURING her visit, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay advised the country's security forces to uphold its constitutional obligations to remain neutral in Zimbabwe's civilian political affairs.

However, the media reported Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa dismissing this concept, contending that senior military officers had an obligation to **"unashamedly"** voice their concerns when **"political independence and the country's sovereignty"** was at stake by virtue of having fought in Zimbabwe's independence war.

In a media briefing held soon after Pillay's own Press conference, Chinamasa reportedly said security chiefs had the right to influence Zimbabwe's political affairs **"to keep this country on course"** (*The Standard*, 27/5).

Earlier, Pillay had warned against the military's involvement in politics, citing a recent statement by Chief of Staff Major-General Martin Chedondo, in which he declared that the Zimbabwe National Army supported ZANU PF and had **"no apologies"** for doing so.

She viewed Chedondo's comments, which attracted indignation from a wide cross section of Zimbabweans, as having no place in any democratic society:

“For any country to be called a democracy, its army must observe strict political neutrality” she said, and referred to Article 13 of the Global Political Agreement (GPA), which declares: ***“State organs and institutions do not belong to any political party and should be impartial in the discharge of their duties”*** (*The Standard*, 27/5).

However, Chinamasa argued ***“political statements by generals were meant to serve as a warning that returning the country to colonialism and opposition to the land reform programme were unacceptable.***

“The army people were liberators and you cannot deny them the voice to keep this country on course...” (*The Standard*, 27/5).

PARTY ACTIVITIES

Media report factionalism in Zimbabwe’s main parties

NEWS of factionalism in ZANU PF and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai’s MDC party were the highlight of the media’s coverage of the activities of Zimbabwe’s main parties in the month.

Both the state and private media reported the infighting as being mostly caused by competition to represent the parties in the forthcoming national elections.

But the private media reported the problem as more pronounced in ZANU PF, which is currently conducting a nationwide restructuring exercise.

So serious was the problem that it topped the agenda of ZANU PF’s Politburo meeting on May 16th, the private media reported.

ZBC agreed, reporting the meeting as having discussed President Mugabe’s call ***against the imposition of candidates***” during ZANU PF’s primary elections (ZBC, 16/5, 8pm).

After the meeting, ZTV (17/5, 8pm) reported the ZANU PF Politburo as having resolved to send the party’s national political commissariat team, led by Webster Shamu, to ***“all areas which reported disputed elections for a re-run”***. The national television station reported party spokesman Rugare Gumbo describing the meeting as a ***“no-holds barred”*** event, during which the party’s presidium expressed its ***“unhappiness”*** with ***“what has been going on during DCC elections”***.

The same day, *The Herald* (17/5) reported ZANU PF's Mashonaland East province as having "reined in" provincial governor Aeneas Chigwedere for causing divisions while trying to assume party leadership from Politburo member Sydney Sekeramayi during a provincial coordinating committee meeting in Marondera.

This report was among the 128 stories the state-controlled media carried on ZANU PF's activities.

The state media's 68 reports on Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and his MDC-T party were mostly negative.

Eleven of them criticized Tsvangirai for splashing US\$40,000 on a kitchen suite makeover for his fiancée, Elizabeth Macheka, before flying to the US to spoil **"his new-found love in belated birthday celebrations that have riled some of the top MDC-T leaders"** (*The Sunday Mail*, 13/5). The state weekly reported that while in the US, the PM gave his fiancée **"an open cheque to spend as she pleases"**; a move the paper claimed, **"alarmed many in the Western-sponsored party"**. It claimed that some senior members of the MDC-T believed Tsvangirai was **"living large"** and **"becoming more and more interested in his personal pleasure"** than providing leadership and prioritizing the party's funding in preparation for national elections.

The remaining 57 stories mostly criticized other MDC-T officials for allegedly lacking leadership qualities and "sabotaging" the country's economy.

The private media gave fair coverage to the activities of Zimbabwe's major parties in their 263 reports: [ZANU PF (174) and MDC-T (89)].

In one such case, the *Zimbabwe Independent* and *Financial Gazette* (11 & 17/5) reported the MDC-T's Bulawayo East district as having passed a vote of no confidence in its MP Thabitha Khumalo, as factionalism in the province **"intensifies"** ahead of national elections.

RIGHTS ABUSES

AS the month drew to a close, the private media reported political violence and the abuse of power, especially by the ZANU PF arm of government, as being on the increase again.

This coincided with observations by UN human rights commissioner Navi Pillay that despite the existence of the inclusive government, polarization in Zimbabwe ***“is still extremely pronounced”***.

She noted that this polarization was acting as a major impediment on a number of fronts, including the advancement of human rights. Pillay added that concern was ***“rising”*** both inside and outside the country that, ***“unless the parties agree quickly on some key major reforms and there is a distinct shift in attitude, the next election which is due some time in the coming year could turn into a repeat of the 2008 elections which resulted in rampant politically-motivated human rights abuses, including killings, torture, rapes, beatings, arbitrary detention, displacements and other violations”***.

The media recorded 49 incidents of rights violations. Of these, 42 (86%) appeared in the private media, while the remaining seven featured in the private media.

They included:

- The alleged attack on MDC-T supporters by suspected ZANU-PF thugs during an MDC-T rally in Mudzi on May 26th, resulting in the death of Cephas Magura, while seven other MDC-T supporters sustained serious injuries (*NewsDay*, 28/5).
- Reports of a police blitz in Harare, arresting women in bars and nightspots suspected of being prostitutes, a move that was condemned by women and human rights organizations (*The Standard*, 27/5), and
- The arrest of a BBC classical music presenter, Petroc Trelawny, in Bulawayo for allegedly operating without a work permit (*The Standard*, 27/5).

Ends/

The MEDIA UPDATE was produced and circulated by the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe, 9 Knight Bruce Road, Milton Park, Harare, Tel: 263 4 741816 / 778115, E-mail: monitors@mmpz.org.zw

Feel free to write to MMPZ. We may not be able to respond to everything but we will look at each message. For previous MMPZ reports, and more information about the Project, please visit our website at <http://www.mmpz.org/>

