



Defending free expression and your right to know

Monitoring the pre-election human rights environment

As political temperatures shoot up ahead of the proposed harmonised polls expected sometime this year, the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (MMPZ) will provide regular updates on the media's coverage of the human rights environment in the country.

This is the first instalment.

The reports are aimed at assessing the role of the media in infusing transparency and accountability in the administration of the election to ensure that these are held in free and fair conditions. As essential part of the election process, it is imperative for the media to play their watchdog role and insist on violence free elections that conform to basic democratic tenets.

What are human rights?

Human rights are complex and difficult to define. This is because they are interdependent and indivisible.

However, they are generally classified as the rights guaranteed to all people irrespective of race, creed, colour, gender or national origin. The free encyclopaedia, Wikipedia, presents human rights as ***“inalienable fundamental rights to which a person is inherently entitled simply because she or he is a human being”***.

Human rights are thus conceived as universal and the same for everyone. These include basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled, which are often given as the right to life and liberty, freedom of thought and expression, and equality before the law.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10 1948 in Paris, champions the doctrine of human rights in the world. It was a direct consequence of the atrocities of the Second World War and represented ***“the first global expression of rights to which all human beings are inherently entitled”***, according to Wikipedia.

The UDHR comprises 30 rights to which all people are entitled. These have largely been split and categorized into civil and political rights; and economic, social and cultural rights.

Civil and political rights are enshrined in articles 3 to 21 of the UDHR and in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Economic, social and cultural rights are protected in articles 22 to 28 of the UDHR and in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

The UDHR framework on human rights has since become the cornerstone of public policy in the world as reflected in global and regional institutions, in the policies of states and the activities of NGOs.

This is also reflected in Zimbabwe's proposed new constitution (Chapter four), which is wholly dedicated to the declaration on human rights. The section encompasses and dwells at length on both civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights.

This report is therefore guided by international, regional and local practice on human rights issues in its tabulation of rights violations carried in the media.

Findings

There were 27 incidents of pre-election rights violations that were monitored in the media in April. All were based on political and civil rights.

Of these, 15 appeared in the print media, while the remaining 12 were contained in the electronic media. The most perpetrated violations stemmed from politically motivated violence, which recorded four incidents, followed by the infringement of human and civic liberties (three) and freedom of expression (two).

ZANU PF and state actors were the chief perpetrators of the rights abuses while the victims were mainly ordinary people and members of the MDC-T.

See Fig 1.

Fig: 1 Pre-election rights violations monitored in the media

Violation	Headline	Details of incident	Source	Perpetrator	Victim
Freedom of expression	<i>Firm fires employee for speaking to press</i>	A quasi government firm allegedly sacks an employee for speaking to the <i>Daily News</i> about the company's failure to pay its workers salaries in February	<i>Daily News</i> (3/4)	Zimbabwe Forestry Commission	Doubt Bhunu (ordinary person)
Restrictions on observing polls	<i>Zim blocks UN team</i>	Prevention of UN Needs Assessment Team from entering the country and assess the election environment.	<i>Daily News & News Day</i> (12/4)	Patrick Chinamasa (ZANU PF)	UN Assessment Team

Freedom of association	<i>Respect church's freedom of choice</i>	ZANU-PF allegedly ambushes prayer meetings to urge church members to vote for president Mugabe in the forthcoming election	<i>Daily News</i> (10/4)	Webster Shamu (Information Minister – ZANU PF)	Johanne Marange Church
Violation of human and civil liberties	<i>Soldiers jailed for kidnapping, attempted murder</i>	Two soldiers from Mutoko are jailed for the kidnapping and attempted murder of a civilian	<i>NewsDay</i> (10/4)	ZNA Officers, Brian Jojo and Maxwell Marize	Thomas Gombera (ordinary person)
Freedom of expression	<i>Zimbabweans not free – Chief Mangwende</i>	Chief Mangwende claims that Zimbabweans were not free to say what they want and have to rely on what they are told to say	<i>NewsDay</i> (11/4)	State apparatus	Ordinary people
Discrimination against political parties	<i>State media under fire</i>	The state media reportedly starts a demonization campaign against PM Tsvangirai	<i>NewsDay</i> (11/4)	State media	PM Tsvangirai/ MDC-T
Violation of human and civil liberties	<i>Police, council and kombi battles put pedestrians at risk</i>	Road users fear for their safety in the wake of unending battles between Kombi drivers and traffic and council police, which have led to serious accidents and deaths of pedestrians	<i>NewsDay</i> (14/4)	ZRP and municipal police	Commuters
Freedom of assembly	<i>Police block Mutare residents march</i>	Police in Mutare allegedly refuses to grant Combined Mutare Residents and Ratepayers permission to march against poor service delivery by the city fathers	<i>NewsDay</i> (15/4)	ZRP	Mutare residents
Political violence	Jim Kunaka threatens MDC T aspiring legislator for Mbare	ZANU PF functionary Jim Kunaka nearly manhandles Sten Zvorwadza, an MDC-T aspiring MP for Mbare, and threatens	<i>The Standard</i> (14/4)	Jim Kunaka (ZANU PF)	Sten Zvorwadza (MDC-T)

		him with unspecified action for allegedly insulting ZANU PF			
Violation of human and civil liberties	<i>Civilians' abuse by soldiers captured on camera</i>	Four Zimbabwe National Army servicemen are captured on camera "roughing up" three unemployed youths in the high density suburb of Glen Norah, Harare	<i>Daily News</i> (10/4)	ZNA	Three unemployed youths
Intimidation and harassment of voters	<i>ZANU-PF targets maids, gardeners</i>	ZANU PF allegedly coerces domestic workers in Harare's leafy suburbs to attend meetings during the night and buy party cards	<i>NewsDay</i> (18/4)	ZANU PF	Maids and gardeners
Political violence	<i>Tables turned against MDC candidate</i>	Aspiring MDC-T legislator for Mbare Sten Zvorwadza becomes the accused after going to the police to report about political violence perpetrated in the constituency by ZANU PF youths.	<i>Daily News</i> (21/4)	ZANU PF youths	Sten Zvorwadza and five other MDC youths
Threats of political violence	<i>We will fight back – MDC T</i>	MDC T spokesperson Douglas Mwonzora allegedly tells party supporters not to take political violence from ZANU-PF lightly but to fight back	<i>NewsDay</i> (22/4)	Douglas Mwonzora (MDC-T MP)	ZANU-PF supporters
Political violence	<i>Aspiring MDC legislator seeks police protection from Chipangano</i>	Aspiring MDC legislator for Mbare Sten Zvorwadza seeks police protection from the ZANU PF-aligned Chipangano youth militia, which he accuses of scuttling his business projects in the constituency	<i>NewsDay</i> (22/4)	Chipangano youth militia (ZANU PF)	Sten Zvorwadza (MDC-T)
Hate speech & Intolerant	Rude awakening for Western	"Mr Tsvangirai is a hopeless leader, bewildered by his	<i>Chronicle</i> (9/4)	Factmore Dzobo	PM Tsvangirai

language	sponsors (Opinion piece by Factmore Dzobo)	<i>waning grassroots support and hounded by his political masters in Britain and Washington who are getting frustrated with his dismal electoral performances spanning over a decade”</i>		(writer)	
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This PUBLICATION 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

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