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Transitional Barometer Monthly Report: February 2010

This report monitors compliance to the terms and spirit of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) of September 15th, 2008 undertaken by the three political parties (MDC T, ZANU PF and MDC M), which form the inclusive government in Zimbabwe, against news stories reported in all mainstream media in the country.

SUMMARY

THERE was a 64% increase in the coverage of the activities of the inclusive government in the public media, from 220 stories in January to 360 in the month under review. However, there was still no evidence of compliance by these media to provisions of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) requiring them to give equitable coverage to the coalition partners.

Once again, ZANU PF received the greatest attention in the government-controlled (public) media with 193 reports (54%), followed by MDC-T with 116 (32%) and 51 (14%) for MDC-M.

The official media's sourcing pattern reflected a similar bias. ZANU PF received the lion's share with 193 (61%) of the 318 voices of the coalition parties these media recorded in the month. Voices from the MDC formations were only accessed 125 times (39%): 76 (24%) for MDC-T and MDC-M 49 (15%).

Figs 1-4 illustrate these disparities.

Stories on ZANU PF's activities were almost always positive, portraying the party as having satisfied all its obligations under the power-sharing agreement.

In contrast, those on the MDC-T were generally negative reports that presented it as an insincere partner in the inclusive government responsible for the lack of progress in the implementation of the GPA, especially through its alleged reluctance to campaign for the lifting of Western sanctions against the ZANU PF elite and its associates, which they misrepresented as national economic sanctions. The MDC-M was reported mainly criticising the MDC-T over the targeted sanctions or demanding that the party call for them to be lifted.

Fig 1: Stories on coalition parties in the government Press

Publication	ZANU PF	MDC-T	MDC-M
<i>The Herald</i>	33	25	14
<i>Chronicle</i>	20	16	7
<i>The Manica Post</i>	7	5	1
<i>The Sunday Mail</i>	4	3	0
<i>Sunday News</i>	4	1	0
Total	68	50	22

Fig 2: Coverage of political parties on ZBC

Station	ZANU PF	MDC-T	MDC-M
ZTV	68	34	15
Spot FM	27	18	4
Radio Zimbabwe	30	14	10
Total	125	66	29

Fig 3: Coverage of political parties in the public Press

Publication	ZANU PF	MDC-T	MDC-M
<i>The Herald</i>	24	14	10
<i>Chronicle</i>	11	4	4
<i>The Manica Post</i>	6	2	0
<i>The Sunday Mail</i>	3	2	0
<i>Sunday News</i>	9	3	0
Total	53	25	14

Fig 4: Political parties' voice distribution on ZBC

Station	ZANU PF	MDC-T	MDC-M
ZTV	81	31	16
Spot FM	24	11	5
Radio Zimbabwe	35	9	14
Total	140	51	35

EU fires up sanctions propaganda

NEWS of the European Union's decision to extend its targeted sanctions for another year against the ZANU PF leadership and its allies gave the government-controlled media an opportunity to keep the issue of sanctions in the headlines for a second consecutive month, presenting them as being the only dispute holding back fulfilment of the GPA.

Out of 360 stories these media carried on the government's activities, 193 (54%) focused on sanctions and accusations that the MDC-T was to blame for them. In fact, 110 (57%) of these exclusively blamed MDC-T for the sanctions – and Zimbabwe's economic collapse – and formed the main plank of the government media's propaganda blitz against ZANU PF's coalition partner. These included 84 news stories (25 of which were heavily editorialised), 13 opinion pieces, seven editorial comments and three current affairs programmes.

The EU's decision and a well-organised ZANU PF youth demonstration outside the American Embassy threatening Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai with unspecified retribution if he failed to call off the sanctions fuelled the government media's criticism that was revived in January by British Foreign Secretary, David Milliband, when he said Britain would "take a cue from the MDC" over the lifting of sanctions.

For example, the government-controlled media's coverage of the unruly scenes in Parliament following ZANU PF's notice to move a motion calling on MDC leaders to campaign for the removal of sanctions only focussed on criticising the MDC-T MPs' opposition to the motion. And *The Saturday Herald's Eagle Eye* columnist (6/2) accused the party of "**shamelessly**" and "**violently**" fighting "**tooth-and-nail for something (sanctions) that hurt**" Zimbabweans.

This lopsided coverage meant there was barely any attempt to report beyond the sanctions rhetoric and give a dispassionate assessment of the coalition's performance in fulfilling the terms of the GPA, particularly in light of the government's first anniversary.

For example, their 27 articles reviewing the coalition's first-year performance did not provide informed analysis, with four reports simplistically comparing economic progress with the previous year as evidence of success but without questioning its sustainability in light of the slow political reforms. Five other reviews selectively blamed the country's poor performance on the MDC's alleged failure to fulfil its GPA obligations. None examined ZANU PF's responsibilities. The rest were general stories on the inclusive government.

The government media also blamed the MDC-T for Zimbabwe's first civil servants strike since August 1996. They cited as evidence Tsvangirai's alleged failure to honour his promise to pay civil servants a "decent" wage (*The Herald* 9/2), and the failure by his party's arm of government, which is in charge of socio-economic ministries, to improve civil servants' working conditions (*The Herald* 12/2).

The government-controlled media's coverage of the controversial regulations gazetted during the month giving force to the Indigenisation and Empowerment Act, forcing foreign-owned companies to "cede" 51 percent ownership to "indigenous" Zimbabweans, predominantly reflected ZANU PF's defence of the regulations, while giving scant attention to concerns from the MDC, the business community and economists, among others, that they were detrimental to economic recovery and investment. For example, *The Herald* (16/2) and ZBC (16/2) reported Tsvangirai's calls for the regulations to be reversed as being aimed at **"seeking to promote lawlessness"**.

The private media gave a more balanced perspective of the political developments with the sanctions debate only forming 29 (30%) of their 97 reports on the coalition's activities.

Although they reported the EU move as having deepened the rift between the parties in the coalition, they reported the decision as being inevitable in view of ZANU PF's reluctance to honour reform pledges in the GPA.

The remaining 68 reports looked at other factors that hindered the effective implementation of the GPA, such as policy differences, mistrust, unilateralism and power struggles in the alliance, issues which commentators contended were **"increasingly likely to split the coalition right through the middle"** (*ZimOnline* 12/2 & *The Zimbabwean on Sunday* 14/2).

Twelve of these reviewed the coalition's performance on its first anniversary. Although these highlighted discernable but slow economic progress, as well as media and constitutional reforms, they questioned the sustainability of these gains in light of the ongoing power struggles among the coalition, and the lack of progress in political and security sector reforms, as well as the lethargy in promoting national healing.

CONSTITUTIONAL & PARLIAMENTARY NEWS

Stop-go constitutional reforms widely covered

THE local media monitored by MMPZ carried 123 reports on constitutional reforms, 80 of which appeared in the government-controlled (public) media and 43 in the private media.

The public media's coverage of the exercise was mainly through the perspective of ZANU PF, with 21 of their reports highlighting the party's "constitution awareness campaigns" around the country urging followers to **"jealously guard the gains of independence"** (ZTV 2/2, 8pm) and adopt the Kariba Draft as the basis for rewriting a new constitution.

Another 32 stories in the public media reported progress in the exercise, including the alleged release of funds by donors (*Herald* & ZBC 25/2, 8pm) and assurances by Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai that the process was **"back on track"** with **"the outreach programme set to start before April"** (*The Herald* 15/2 and ZTV 18/2, 8pm). Eleven others highlighted problems, mainly relating to the under-funding of the outreach consultation exercise, and the role of donors, with the Parliamentary Select Committee on constitutional reform (Copac)

reportedly arguing that the exercise should not be **“hijacked”** by foreigners (*The Herald* 4/2).

Notably, the public media did not independently carry any civic education to familiarise the public about the role they are being asked to play in making a new constitution. However, their remaining 16 stories highlighted the concerns of special interest groups like women, environmentalists and the disabled, as well as calls for Zimbabweans to conduct themselves peacefully in the constitution-making exercise.

Ten stories in the private media also reported on the concerns of special interest groups.

They also continued to assess the constitution-making process, with 10 stories reporting progress, mainly reassurances of continued funding by the donors (Studio 7, 4/2). However, 23 reports (14 news stories, five editorials, four opinion pieces) focused on the shortcomings of the exercise, which commentators condemned as being a **“partisan, “opaque”** process that **“lacks inclusivity, leadership and cohesion”** (*Zimbabwe Independent* 26/2). Some of the drawbacks they reported included:

- The dominance of politicians in the leadership of the thematic committees and in the composition of outreach teams, and the under-representation of civil society and the church and their limited roles. (*The Zimbabwe Independent* 26/2).
- Internal disagreements, as well as the suspension of the outreach programme due to financial constraints (*Zimbabwe Independent* 12 & 26/2)
- ZANU-PF’s alleged efforts to limit the number of outreach meetings in urban areas so that people would not have the chance to contribute to the new constitution (*The Zimbabwean* 11/2).
- ZANU-PF outreach activities, which were viewed as a parallel process and part of an aggressive marketing campaign for the Kariba Draft in the state media intended to **“intimidate, indoctrinate and hoodwink Zimbabweans into coming up with a replica of the Kariba Draft constitution”** (*Zimbabwe Independent* 12/2)
- Calls by the Civil Society Monitoring Mechanism (CISOMM) urging politicians to **“depoliticise the process for it to be regarded as legitimate”** (*The Zimbabwean* 21/2).

Sanctions debate dominates Parliament

THE government media paid greater attention to parliamentary issues, carrying 57 stories against 26 in the private media.

However, 26 of the public media’s reports (46%) mainly accessed critics of the MDC-T MPs’ opposition to a motion by ZANU-PF legislators calling on the MDC-T to campaign for the removal of sanctions.

The rest of the stories, like those in the private media, were generally fair updates on parliamentary proceedings, such as the debates and public meetings on the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) amendments (*Chronicle* 19/2 & *The Standard* 21/2) and parliamentary hearings on the controversies surrounding the

mining of Chiadzwa's diamonds, with *The Herald* (5/2) urging government to **"quickly institute thorough investigations"** into the matter.

MEDIA REFORMS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Media Reforms lose steam

THE official media did not give informed updates on the fate of the inclusive government's promised media reforms in the 17 reports they carried on media issues.

Of these, 10 simply reported the authorities' plans to launch a second state television channel without questioning their continued procrastination in delivering on their GPA obligations to provide a **"free and diverse media"** by licensing independent broadcasters. Only four updated their audiences on the belated official appointment of commissioners to the media regulatory body, the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC), which they presented as evidence of progress in the implementation of the power-sharing accord.

The remaining three comprised two general reports on the freezing of licence fees and a meeting between the national broadcaster, ZBC, and national signal carrier, Transmedia, over poor transmission; and a passive report on Police Commissioner-General Augustine Chihuri censuring privately owned newspapers and online agencies for **"tarnishing the force's image by reporting falsehoods"** (*The Herald* 10/2).

The private media adopted a more critical approach. While six of the 16 reports they carried on media issues viewed the official appointment of the ZMC commissioners as significant, the rest expressed reservations about the slow pace of the reforms, continued harassment of journalists and the persistent use of offensive and intolerant language against critics of ZANU PF in the public media.

Public media censor human rights abuses

THE government-controlled media recorded nine incidents of rights-related abuses in the month, a third of the 27 incidents the private media published in the same period.

Seven of the nine cases recorded in the official media identified MDC activists as being responsible while naming ZANU PF supporters as the victims. The two remaining stories dismissed reports of violence against MDC supporters by suspected ZANU PF followers without investigating the initial reports.

The private media's 27 reports on rights-related violations generally identified MDC and civic society activists, students, journalists and ordinary people as the victims and ZANU PF supporters and state security as the offenders.

Some of the cases of rights-related abuses reported in the media included:

- The alleged beating of at least 34 people from the Bhuka area in Masvingo by suspected ZANU PF youths for attending an MDC rally (*The Zimbabwean* 11/2).

- The arrest of MDC provincial vice-chairman for Mashonaland Central Godfrey Chimombe for allegedly “insulting the president” at a political rally (SW Radio Africa 16/2).
- The alleged shredding of copies of the Prime Minister’s newsletter and the intimidation of people reading the paper by ZANU PF youths, war veterans and soldiers at Mutoko Centre (*The Zimbabwean* 18/2).
- An alleged attack on six ZANU PF youths by 60 suspected MDC-T supporters in Epworth (*The Herald & Studio 7* 24/2)
- The arrest of an accredited Mexican journalist by the police in Masvingo (*New Zimbabwe.com* & SW Radio Africa 17/2)
- The arrest of 10 university students, including four Zimbabwe National Students’ Union officials, following a meeting over tuition and accommodation problems at the University of Zimbabwe (*Studio 7* 3/2 & SW Radio Africa 14/2)
- A raid on the offices of the General Agriculture and Plantation Workers’ Union of Zimbabwe by state security agents in search of union leader Gertrude Hambira, and the arrest of two staff members over a documentary chronicling violence against farm workers by the state (SW Radio Africa & *ZimOnline* 26/2)
- The arrest of four MDC-T activists in Beitbridge for allegedly intruding into the home of Home Affairs Co-Minister Kembo Mohadi following a scuffle involving rival MDC factions during the party’s executive meeting (*The Chronicle* 10/2),
- Alleged threats against Attorney-General Johannes Tomana by British and Australian nationals (*The Chronicle* 22/2).
- Alleged death threats against ZANU-PF legislator Zacharia Ziyambi by suspected MDC-T MPs for seconding a motion denouncing sanctions in Parliament (*The Herald* 6/2).

End/

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Zimbabwe, 9 Knight Bruce Road, Milton Park, Harare, Tel: 263 4 741816 / 778115, E-mail: monitors@mmpz.org.zw

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