



Defending free expression and your right to know

**The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
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COMMENT

MMPZ notes with the gravest concern the sudden surge in the persecution of private media journalists in Zimbabwe by the authorities.

In the past two weeks the private media have recorded the harassment and arrest of at least nine journalists across the country, mainly stemming from stories exposing government brutality in elections with the complicity of the police force. The cases involved three freelancers from Manicaland, five journalists from Alpha Media Holdings, publishers of the private daily, *NewsDay*, and the weeklies the *Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Standard*, and the Editor of the UK-based weekly, *The Zimbabwean*.

As we went to Press, *NewsDay* (18/11) reported the arrest of *The Standard's* Bulawayo-based journalist Nqobani Ndlovu for contravening Section 96 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act, which criminalizes the publication of falsehoods. The charges emanated from the story, *Police exams cancelled*, published in the private weekly (14/11), which alleged plans by the Zimbabwe Republic Police to recall retired police officers and war veterans to occupy vacant top posts to direct operations in next year's elections. The paper claimed the recall ***"follows the scrapping of this year's promotional examinations for the police force...which are used as the basis for promoting junior officers to the ranks of sergeant and inspector"***.

NewsDay (18/11) also reported the police as having expressed their intention to question *The Standard* editor Nevanji Madanhire over the same report. Prior to Ndlovu's arrest, the police had reportedly picked up his friend and *NewsDay's* Bulawayo bureau chief, Dumisani Sibanda, for questioning and was only released on condition that he brought along Ndlovu the following day.

These incidents were not isolated.

Last week, the police summoned journalists from the *Zimbabwe Independent* over a story exposing Police Commissioner-General Augustine Chihuri's alleged opposition to electoral reforms (*The Zimbabwean*, 11/11). This came barely a week after the police announced that they had secured a warrant of arrest for editor-in-chief of *The Zimbabwean* Wilf Mbanga in connection with a story implicating state agents in the suspected murder of a senior elections official, Ignatius Mushangwe, in the 2008 presidential run-off (*The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 7/11). Mbanga denied publishing such a story.

MMPZ views such harassment as unwarranted persecution of the country's independent media community and an indication of the heavy-handed use of repressive laws that is likely to be pursued by the authorities in the period leading up to next year's elections. Such action is not only a blow to any hopes for genuine media reforms signed up to by the parties to the coalition government, but to all Zimbabweans' hopes for a less suffocating media environment that prevailed during the country's last traumatic election experience.

SUMMARY

STATEMENTS by Zimbabwe's coalition parties reiterating their frustration with the inclusive government's failure to operate smoothly received most publicity in all media this week.

The comments, which raised political temperatures within the unstable alliance to boiling point, coincided with news of the disruption of parliamentary activities by MDC-T senators in protest against President Mugabe's unilateral reappointment of the country's governors and the intensification in the use of inflammatory language against the MDC-T in the ZANU PF-controlled state media.

While ZBC gave widespread publicity to ZANU PF's election campaign activities, it censored those of the MDC groups. And although the official papers reported and commented more widely on the activities of the MDC-T than the rest of the media, their coverage remained almost exclusively negative.

Fig 1: Topical news distribution in the media

Media	Power sharing dispute	Corruption	Elections	ZANU PF campaigns	MDC activities	Human rights
Official press	11	13	4	7	16	1
ZBC	25	7	8	42	0	0
Private papers	34	26	21	10	3	14
Private radios	6	6	2	0	2	11
Online agencies	10	6	2	1	2	4
Total	86	58	37	60	23	30

Media report coalition on the brink of collapse

REMARKS by senior officials from Zimbabwe's two main coalition parties that the inclusive government was not working appeared to vindicate reports that the coalition was on the verge of collapse.

The comments, which made headlines in both the government and private media, came fresh on the heels of President Mugabe's expressed resentment of the coalition, announcing that he was not interested in extending its life beyond August 2011 while addressing a meeting of ZANU PF's Women's League recently.

However, none of the media tried to link Mugabe's contempt for the coalition to the latest conflict, especially the spirited campaigns by the state media and ZANU PF officials calling for an end to the inclusive government.

They mostly concentrated on exposing the symptoms and not the root cause of the problems. Among these symptoms was the disruption of Senate business by MDC senators in protest against the presence of ZANU PF provincial governors, unilaterally reappointed by Mugabe last October, and the escalation of offensive language against the MDC component of government.

The official media passively quoted ZANU PF officials and their allies lobbying for the inclusive government to be dissolved without assessing the implications of such a move. They quoted these sources 10 times making these calls in the two-week period from Monday, November 1st to Sunday, November 14th 2010.

For example, Vice-President John Nkomo told a ZANU PF provincial committee meeting in Matabeleland that ZANU PF ***"made the mistake of entering"*** the inclusive government ***"thinking this was the best way forward"*** (*The Sunday Mail*, 14/11). He added: ***"We can't sit at the same table with the enemy and pretend to be friends when we are not. We are strange bedfellows and the earlier we separate the better"***.

The government controlled media restricted themselves to quoting ZANU PF sources, or published editorials and opinion pieces blaming the MDC formations, particularly the one led by Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai for the problems in the coalition, singling out its alleged reluctance to admit that Zimbabwe was under Western sanctions and its disruption of Senate proceedings.

The Herald (11/11), for instance, quoted ZANU PF Chief Whip Tambudzani Mohadi, Chief Musarurwa, Mashonaland Central provincial governor Martin Dinha, and a senator from the smaller MDC faction **“condemning”** the MDC-T’s behaviour, which led to the adjournment of Senate to February 2011, without assessing what prompted this crippling legislative paralysis.

The previous evening, ZTV (10/11, 8pm) reported MDC-T’s Masvingo Central MP Jefferson Chitando as having **“stunned”** MPs in the House of Assembly by **“calling for the extension of illegal sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe by the West”**, apart from **“openly admitting”** that his party allegedly campaigned for their imposition without giving his reasons for the calls. It quoted ZANU PF’s MP for Mberengwa East, Makhosini Hlongwane, **“media practitioner”** Caesar Zvayi and **“analysts”**, such as Gabriel Chaibva, describing Chitando’s **“utterances”** as **“clear proof”** that the MDC-T **“is the real enemy of the people of Zimbabwe”**.

The private media viewed the disruption of Senate sessions, the vilification of the MDC formations, and the admission by the two main coalition parties that the alliance was not working, as evidence that Zimbabwe’s troubled coalition was on the verge of collapse.

The Zimbabwean On Sunday (14/11) quoted Veritas, an independent legal and parliamentary watchdog, arguing that the suspension of Senate business was likely to paralyze government, as it was likely to **“delay the passing of pending Bills...”**

Tsvangirai’s admission before a French TV news channel, France 24, that his relations with Mugabe had severely deteriorated since Mugabe’s unilateral re-appointment of provincial governors reinforced the general perception of the GNU’s paralysis (Studio 7, SW Radio Africa & *New Zimbabwe.com*, 11/11).

Media report widespread corruption

SPECULATION over the source of Local Government Minister Ignatius Chombo's alleged wealth and allegations that Mines Minister Obert Mpofu solicited bribes from companies that were seeking the right to mine Chiadzwa's diamonds, reinforced fears that corruption was becoming endemic in the echelons of power in Zimbabwe.

Questions over Chombo's wealth and corruption allegations against Mpofu came just two weeks after the Global Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Zimbabwe as one of the world's **"highly corrupt"** countries (*NewsDay*, 13/11). It came 134 out of the 178 surveyed countries.

Although the official media widely publicized Chombo's assets, which came to light because of a court case on the protracted divorce wrangle between the minister and his estranged wife (*The Herald*, 4 & 13/11), the paper (16/11) eventually apologised to the minister after his lawyers demanded a retraction and apology (*The Herald* 10/11), stating that 80 percent of the multi-million-dollar portfolio of properties and assets allegedly listed for distribution did not belong to Chombo. These included at least 80 residential stands, 20 houses, 15 cars and 12 investment companies.

However, the official media concealed corruption allegations against Mpofu and omitted excerpts of the Comptroller and Auditor-General's report exposing gross mismanagement and abuse of government resources.

The private media speculated about the source of Chombo's wealth; publicized corruption allegations against Mpofu and provided more detail on the Comptroller and Auditor-General's report.

NewsDay & *New Zimbabwe.com* (13 & 15/11) reported Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai castigating Chombo's alleged accumulation of wealth as **"shameless and primitive"**, adding that his assets were **"merely a tip of the iceberg"** compared to other senior ZANU PF officials. The MDC-T and civic groups urged government officials implicated in corruption to resign (*NewsDay*, 13/11).

HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

THE private media registered a further decline in the number of human rights violations during the week.

They recorded eight incidents, a 38 percent decrease from last week's 13 incidents.

Again, the official media completely ignored these violations, which included:

- Reports that ZANU PF youths in Harare's high-density suburb of Mbare were forcing pubs to play ZANU PF praise songs from the Mbare Chimurenga Choir (*The Standard*, 14/11).
- Allegations that more than 300 soldiers marched through the streets of Masvingo threatening war unless President Mugabe is allowed to rule for life (Studio 7, SW Radio Africa, *The Zimbabwean* & *The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 8, 9, 11 & 14/11), and
- Alleged assault on an MDC-T official, Solomon Mazvokwadi, by soldiers at Green Valley Farm in Chipinge (SW Radio Africa & *The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 10 & 14/11).

THE LOUDEST VOICES

ZANU PF was the most frequently quoted party in the official media this week, exposing the bias of these media in favour of the party.

This violated Article 19.1(d) of the Global Political Agreement (GPA), which compels them to provide **"balanced and fair coverage"** to all the parties **"for their legitimate political activities"**.

Out of the 51 times that Zimbabwe's coalition parties were quoted in the government, ZANU PF was heard 34 times (67%), while the two MDC formations spoke 17 times: [MDC-T (14) and MDC-M (three)].

ZANU PF officials also topped the list of the most quoted individuals. The party's national chairman Simon Khaya Moyo (12 times) came first, followed by Vice-Presidents, Joice Mujuru (11) and John Nkomo (nine), Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa (seven) and Matabeleland South provincial chairman Andrew Langa (five).

All of them were quoted canvassing support for their party and vilifying the MDC-T.

Prime Minister Tsvangirai was the most quoted in the private media.

He was heard eight times, followed by MDC-M secretary-general Welshman Ncube (seven), National Constitutional Assembly chairman Lovemore Madhuku (four) and Senate President Edna Madzongwe and presidential spokesman George Charamba (three times each).

Tsvangirai was quoted expressing disappointed with Mugabe's violation of the GPA and lambasting corrupt government officials. Ncube reiterated his party's position that Zimbabwe was not ready for elections. Madhuku highlighted plans to mobilize support to vote against the anticipated draft constitution in next year's referendum. Madzongwe reprimanded MDC-T senators for disrupting Senate sessions, while Charamba declared that government was not ready to licence new players in the broadcasting sector.

Did you know...?

- THAT the South African facilitation team tasked by SADC to help resolve the political crisis in Zimbabwe has poured cold water on talk of an early election, saying that can only happen after the development of "a roadmap for elections" (*The Sunday Times*, SA 14/11).
- That the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) chairman Simpson Mutambanengwe has repeated the view that his commission would not be able to manage next year's proposed elections unless government urgently provided it with funds to carry out reforms needed to ensure that the elections are credible (*The Sunday Times*), and
- That one of the negotiators in Zimbabwe's protracted power sharing talks, Industry and Commerce Minister Welshman Ncube, criticized the inclusive government for failing to reform the country's broadcasting sector, as agreed under the GPA. Ncube made the remarks while addressing a broadcast conference in Harare, organized by the Media Institute of Southern Africa (*Daily News*, 9/11).

What they said...

“He has 15 cars. What does he want to do with all those cars? It is like a baboon that goes into a field and takes a maize cob and puts it under one armpit and then the other side. As it is walking it is attracted to another cob and breaks it again, leading to many cobs collecting on the ground” – Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai castigating Local Government Minister Ignatius Chombo (*NewsDay & New Zimbabwe.com*, 15/11).

“It is disheartening that some people got into the inclusive government without the intention to make it work and it is even more disheartening when an ambassador claims that there are no economic sanctions on the country. We cannot tolerate such lies. Enough is enough!” – Vice President John Nkomo (*The Sunday Mail*, 14/11).

“What is going to happen is that supporters of the puppet MDC party will be beheaded and their families will be handed over the body without the head for burial” – an unidentified senior ZANU PF official speaking to a private radio station, VOP, about his party’s launch of *“Operation Headless Chicken”* for next year’s anticipated election campaign. This official said the operation would replace ZANU PF’s brutal June 2008 election campaign (*Daily News*, 13/11).

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