

**The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
Monday November 29th – Sunday December 5th 2010
Weekly Media Review 2010-47**

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This report is MMPZ's final media review of the year. Our service will resume on January 14th 2011 with a review of the news that has happened over the holiday period. We wish our readers a happy, stress-free Christmas and a New Year of prosperity and constructive reform.

THE WEEK'S TOP STORIES

PRIVATE diplomatic correspondence between the former US ambassador to Zimbabwe, Christopher Dell, and his government, leaked by a website called *Wikileaks*, provoked outrage from ZANU PF and the media outlets it controls this week.

The correspondence was part of thousands of classified US diplomatic messages publicized by this website. They were mostly written by senior US officials expressing their personal views on America's foreign policy and leadership credentials of political figures, including President Mugabe and his coalition partners.

The government media ignored Dell's criticism of Mugabe's misrule while giving widespread publicity to his reservations about Prime Minister Tsvangirai's leadership abilities.

Dell's admission that his government supported the MDC-T opened the floodgates of disdainful criticism against the party and its leader.

This overshadowed all other national issues, such as the need to resolve the prolonged power-sharing dispute and constitutional reform.

While the private media also gave significant publicity to Dell's controversial correspondence, they were not distracted from other pertinent matters such as ongoing political violence, which they argued was evidence that Zimbabwe was not yet ready for credible national elections.

Fig 1: Topical news distribution in the media

Media	Wikileaks	Power sharing	ZANU PF activities	MDC-T activities	Constitution	Human rights
Official Press	15	6	9	11	2	2
ZBC	15	6	31	0	8	5
Private Press	6	14	4	2	3	16
Private radios	3	8	2	0	1	14
Online agencies	8	11	1	0	0	12
Total	47	45	47	13	14	49

State media feast on Wikileaks

LEAKED diplomatic correspondence between former US ambassador Christopher Dell and his government about Zimbabwe's political crisis and its leadership gifted ZANU PF and the state media with a providential opportunity to vilify the MDC-T as shameless puppets of the West.

This was based on the grounds that Dell had indicated his government was working with the two MDC formations to remove President Mugabe and his party from power.

The classified documents, dating from 2007, were among 250,000 others leaked by *Wikileaks* on November 28th.

The official media ignored Dell's candid assessment of Zimbabwe's political situation and the chances of the two MDC groups replacing ZANU PF.

Instead, *The Herald's* news story (30/11) interpreted Dell's assessment of MDC-T leader Morgan Tsvangirai and the need to support his government if his party won the 2008 election, to mean that the US had **“failed to effect regime change”** in Zimbabwe **“because it was working with a weak MDC party with an inept leadership”** in its heavily editorialized front-page story. While the paper publicized Dell's criticism of the MDC leaders, it censored his equally unflattering comments about President Mugabe.

Instead, *The Herald* and ZTV (30/11, 8pm and 1 & 2/12, 8pm) seized the chance to access comment from ZANU PF officials and the party's supporters, mostly masquerading as **“observers”**. Veterans such as Chris Mutsvangwa, Goodwills Masimirembwa and Tafataona Mahoso were heard arguing that the **“revelation”** proved that the MDC groups were **“mere pawns”** of Western imperialism.

ZANU PF national chairman Simon Khaya Moyo, its spokesman Rugare Gumbo, and women's league leaders Oppah Muchinguri and Olivia Muchena told ZTV (30/11, 8pm) that the documents had **"vindicated"** their party's belief that the MDC-T were **"lapdogs"** of the West and had **"no agenda or vision for the country"**.

Herald columnist Reason Wafawarova summed up the state media's attitude (2/12) when he described Tsvangirai as **"extremely deplorable"** and **"a black voice fronting white bitterness"**, which he argued was **"undeniable and indefensible"**.

The private media resisted inserting editorial comment in their news reports on Dell's correspondence, which they argued was a fair and accurate assessment of Zimbabwe's political situation at the time.

These media also viewed the correspondence as having the potential to inflame the already fragile relations between Zimbabwe's coalition partners and the US.

ZimOnline (30/11) published an article from the Institute for Democracy in Africa warning that Mugabe and his party were likely to use the revelations to **"crush"** the MDC-T ahead of next year's anticipated election, an argument echoed by political commentator Takura Zhangazha (*NewsDay*, 3/12).

NewsDay and *New Zimbabwe.com* (30/11) quoted US ambassador Charles Ray apologizing for the leaks, but pointed out that Dell's observations were his personal opinion, which did not reflect US foreign policy.

ZANU PF discredit 'semi-legal' GPA

PRESIDENT Mugabe's expression of contempt for Zimbabwe's national unity government summed up his party's frustration with this political arrangement.

His remarks have become a chorus-line echoed by other senior ZANU PF officials at political gatherings and government functions.

The government media quoted ZANU PF officials expressing this in 17 of the 40 stories they carried on the party's political activities.

None of the stories questioned the possible motives for ZANU PF's sudden U-turn, considering that Mugabe and other senior party officials are on record glossing over problems in the inclusive government and insisting that it was the best alternative. Neither did they view these sentiments as possibly a way of justifying Mugabe's calls for early national elections.

The Sunday Mail (5/12) passively quoted Mugabe saying he **"feels awkward"** being part of the inclusive government because it allegedly drew authority from a **"semi-legal"** and **"makeshift"** political arrangement. He said this in an interview after his recent meeting with South African President Jacob Zuma. Mugabe said Zimbabwe should not be governed under the Global Political Agreement (GPA) **"for too long"** because the pact allegedly **"lacks a well-founded constitutional governance structure"**. The paper did not ask Mugabe what he meant considering that the coalition was created

by Constitutional Amendment No.19, which was passed by Parliament in February 2008.

ZTV (6 & 7/12, 8pm) quoted other senior ZANU PF officials such as Simon Khaya Moyo, John Nkomo, Stan Mudenge and ZANU PF commentators, such as Gabriel Chaibva, Chris Mutsvangwa and Jonathan Moyo echoing Mugabe's sentiments and accusing the MDC-T of "***pandering to the whims and caprices of the West***".

The private media did not pay significant attention to the campaign activities of the country's main political parties. But they did quote civic groups, such as the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and Bulawayo Agenda, criticizing ZANU PF for allegedly militarizing the electoral process (*New Zimbabwe.com*, 1 & 4/12).

News falls foul of selective reporting

MMPZ has noted a disturbing tendency by the privately owned daily, *NewsDay*, to ignore some events attended by President Mugabe as head of state in recent weeks. It has also ignored some of his comments and speeches.

For example, *NewsDay* all but ignored the Third Africa-European summit in Libya and did not report Mugabe's criticism of the West for its perceived double standards over human rights issues.

Of course, while *The Herald* (2/12) predictably splashed this news as its front-page lead, *NewsDay's* readers were deprived of any report about the President's comments and how European and African leaders received them.

In the process, the private daily's readers also did not get to know about the fact that the summit had been boycotted by a number of important African figures, including the chairman of the African Union itself, Malawi's president Bingu wa Mutharika, apparently in protest against the summit being held in Libya instead of at the AU's headquarters in Ethiopia. This news could at least be found buried in *The Herald's* story, though it warranted a front-page news story of its own.

By deliberately ignoring Mugabe *NewsDay* exposes itself to criticism that it is biased. But more importantly, its readers will be obliged to seek alternative sources of information to find out what the country's president is talking about. While this is often predictable, it is not wise for a national daily to censor news of the activities of the country's head of state altogether.

To be fair, Zimpapers' titles are repeatedly guilty of much more blatant bias that totally distorts the perception of Zimbabwe's political environment. But this is because they fall directly under the control of ZANU PF officials in the coalition government and therefore will never be able to provide an independent, accurate perspective of these important developments.

For example, while *The Herald* was trumpeting Mugabe's criticism of the West in Tripoli, *NewsDay* (2/12) was reporting disturbing news of an increase in politically motivated violence. Its front-page stories that day reported the violent eviction of more than 400 suspected MDC supporters from flea markets and council offices in Mbare, and a report from the Progressive Teachers' Union that the lives of its members around the country were being threatened by state security agents.

RIGHTS ABUSES CONTINUE

THE private media continue to record incidents of political intimidation and violence against perceived opponents of ZANU PF.

Ten of the 12 incidents reported this week were related to next year's proposed national elections, an indication of how difficult it would be for Zimbabwe to hold credible polls under these circumstances.

They included:

- Threats by war veterans' leader Jabulani Sibanda that his members would **"shed"** the **"blood"** of MDC-T supporters in the Lowveld if they do not support ZANU PF (SW Radio Africa, 1/12).
- Clashes between ZANU PF and MDC-T supporters at the wake of a suspected MDC-T youth, Augustine Mahute, who died in police custody in unclear circumstances. His relatives claim that the police assaulted Mahute while in custody (SW Radio Africa and *Newsday*, 1/12).
- Clashes between supporters of ZANU PF and the MDC-T in Chitungwiza (*The Standard*, 5/12).
- The arrest of MDC-T Matabeleland North provincial chairman Senzeso Tshabangu for holding an 'unsanctioned' meeting (SW Radio Africa, 29/11), and
- Arrest of Rusape farmer Elliot Mate for allegedly denigrating and undermining the Office of the President. (*The Herald*, 1/12).

THE MOST QUOTED

ZANU PF national chairman Simon Khaya Moyo was the most frequently quoted individual in the government media.

He was accessed 22 times. Constitutional Parliamentary Committee (Copac) co-chairman Paul Mangwana (eight), President Mugabe (six) and another Copac co-chairman Douglas Mwonzora (four) followed.

Moyo castigated the MDC-T as Western stooges following the release of confidential documents by *Wikileaks*. Mangwana and Mwonzora complained about inadequate funding of the constitutional reform programme, Mugabe attacked the West for interfering in the domestic affairs of smaller countries.

Former US ambassador Christopher Dell ruled the roost in the private media. He was quoted 11 times. MDC-T spokesperson Nelson Chamisa (nine) came second, followed by South African President Jacob Zuma (six) and Mugabe (five).

Dell assessed the qualities of Zimbabwe's major political players, while Chamisa was quoted reacting to Dell's assessment. Zuma urged the West to lift sanctions against Zimbabwe, while Mugabe attacked the West and expressed his contempt of the inclusive government.

What they said...

THE *Wikileaks* story fuelled a fresh outburst of offensive and abusive comments from ZANU PF and its supporters that graphically illustrate the increasingly belligerent political atmosphere between the two main parties within the coalition government.

"I told President Zuma I am a lawyer and am unhappy to be in a thing which is semi-legal. We have to be in a thing which is proper; which is constitutional. I feel awkward in a thing like that (GPA), absolutely awkward" – President Mugabe speaking to *The Sunday Mail* (5/12).

"This creature called the MDC is a creation of America. To us, this is a day to smile, it's a day to say...we told you...The MDC should stand up and apologize to the world for having lied that they were for democracy when the truth is that they are graduated puppets from the West" – ZANU PF national chairman Simon Khaya Moyo (ZTV, 30/11, 8pm).

"To those who were sent to alter the objectives of the revolution, our answer is very simple. The revolution will not be changed by pieces of paper and pencil, it was won by blood and will be defended by blood!" – Senior ZANU PF official Stan Mudenge (ZTV, 7/12, 8pm).

"ZANU PF will rule forever. An election is a declaration for war against the party. Blood must spill like in a war...We are geared for that. We will establish bases a few days before elections to deal with those against ZANU PF even if it means killing" - former Kariba MP Tongai Nyikadzino addressing party supporters at a rally in Hurungwe (VOP and *The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 1 & 5/12).

"I'm one of the people who believe that it's better to own 10% of an elephant than 90% of a rat. Agribank is a rat at the moment" – Finance Minister Tendai Biti announcing government's plans to sell 10 parastatals, including Agribank, to foreign investors (*NewsDay*, 7/12).

Ends/

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