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The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
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Weekly Media Review 2011-15

State media scramble to cover up gaffe over Troika

THE basis on which the SADC Troika on Politics, Defence and Security, condemned Zimbabwe's coalition parties for failing to resolve the country's political crisis, especially the current wave of violence and other human rights violations, remained a subject of intense media debate – particularly in the official media.

These media presented the Troika's decision on Zimbabwe as a travesty of justice, which was arrived at using misleading evidence from the MDC-T. Six of the 12 reports on the topic gave this impression.

The Sunday Mail (17/4) report, *Tsvangirai's tale of lies*, epitomised this.

It diverted attention from the substance of Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's alleged submissions to the SADC Troika, that the state had invoked Section 121 of the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act chiefly as a weapon to prosecute his party members, by questioning the political affiliation of some of the people he reportedly listed as victims of that repressive legislation.

The paper reported Tsvangirai as having raised a ***“false alarm in the region”*** by pretending Zimbabwe risked facing uprisings similar to those in North Africa and had misled facilitators to the Global Political Agreement (GPA) that 45 civic society activists recently arrested for ***“plotting an Egyptian-style uprising in the country were members of his party”*** and were being ***“persecuted”*** by the Attorney-General.

The paper did not independently establish the political affiliation of the 45, nor did it identify the remaining 49 individuals who had fallen victim to the notorious Section 121 that the MDC-T allegedly listed in its **“glossy and fancy report to the facilitation team”**, except to dismiss them as being involved in **“public violence, treason, sabotage and banditry”**.

The Sunday Mail (17/4) also made use of unidentified sources to support its distorted report, one of them an alleged member of South Africa’s ANC who was quoted saying it was **“highly irresponsible for the MDC-T to create a false situation such as this with the apparent objective of misleading the leadership in SADC for cheap political purposes”**.

The government papers carried four opinion pieces discrediting SADC’s resolutions on this basis.

One of them, by columnist Reason Wafawarova, dismissed the Troika’s resolutions as **“a document whose content was manufactured over goat meat and other ‘delicious’ traditional dishes...”** served at a function at the rural home of SADC facilitator and South African President Jacob Zuma attended by Tsvangirai shortly before the Troika meeting.

In six other reports, the government media amplified denials by the ZANU PF arm of government that there was a diplomatic row between Zimbabwe and SADC, particularly South Africa, following Mugabe’s criticism of the Troika (ZBC, 14 & 19/4, 8pm and official dailies, 15/4).

They reported Mugabe as having **“shamed”** the private media by **“paying tribute to SADC for its unwavering support”** for Zimbabwe and quoted “political analysts” rebuking the private media for **“creating an imaginary”** row between Zimbabwe and SADC (ZTV, 19/4, 8pm).

The private media quoted MDC-T officials refuting claims by the official media that it had misled the Troika and argued that Zuma had no obligation to submit his report to Zimbabwe’s coalition principals before the Troika meeting.

The *Zimbabwe Independent* (15/4) also revealed that Zuma’s report was largely based on the findings of Zimbabwe’s own Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee and the South African facilitation team.

Public media feast on MDC-T violence

THE intra-party violence that has characterized the MDC-T's provincial restructuring exercise ahead of its national congress at the end of the month continued to attract media attention in the week.

Both the official and private media reported at least nine incidents of MDC-T intra-party violence in Bulawayo, Mutare and the Midlands, three of eight provinces where the party held its elections over the past two weeks (*The Herald* 8/4, *Sunday News* 10/4, *Chronicle* 12/4, *Manica Post* 15/4).

The official media used these cases of intra-party skirmishes to portray the MDC-T's "**internal structures**" as being "**embroiled in unprecedented violence never seen in any political party in the country in decades**" (*The Sunday Mail* 17/4).

They dedicated 12 reports – 11 news stories and one news feature – to emphasize this claim, 'exposing' how the inherently "**very dangerous political formation**" of the MDC-T was "**indulging in large scale violence countrywide**", (ZBC, 11 & 13/4, 8pm and *The Herald*, *Sunday News* and *The Manica Post*, 8, 10 & 15/4). All the official media's reports on the matter were based either on unnamed sources or ZANU PF sympathisers such as Goodson Nguni and Maxwell Hove.

The MDC-T's internal fighting was also used as evidence to disabuse Zimbabweans and SADC's alleged perception that ZANU PF was a violent party responsible for the new spate of political violence in the country, and as vindication for Police Commissioner-General Augustine Chihuri's portrayal of the MDC-T as the chief perpetrator of violence.

The official dailies (14/4), for instance, gave prominence to MDC-T organizing secretary Elias Mudzuri's comment that his party "**cannot guarantee peace**" at the party's national congress to illustrate what it claimed was the violent nature of the party. They attached no relevance to Mudzuri saying his party was investigating the provincial disturbances because the party did "**not brook any violence**".

Once again *The Sunday Mail* (17/4) resorted to unnamed sources to corroborate its unsubstantiated claims, this time quoting a political science lecturer claiming Mudzuri's ***"shocking confession"*** had ***"put the prevalence of violence as the political DNA of the MDC-T into perspective..."*** He added: ***"The truth about the violent nature of the MDC-T is now speaking for itself in public ways that are...now embarrassing the MDC-T's British, EU and US handlers who have been desperate to create the false impression that political violence...is only a ZANU PF problem"***.

While private radio stations generally ignored incidents of violence between rival MDC-T factions, the problem received significant coverage in the rest of the private media.

The private online news agencies and print media however, also quoted the party's leadership expressing concern over the problem and promising to take strong measures against those responsible for the violence (*NewsDay*, *Daily News* and Radio VoP, 14, 17 & 18/4).

They also highlighted efforts by the MDC-T leadership to stem the problem and quoted party leader Morgan Tsvangirai warning that factionalism and violence made the MDC-T no different from ZANU PF and could lead to the demise of the party (*NewsDay*, *New Zimbabwe.com* and Radio VoP, 15, 17 and 18/4).

The government media suffocated this countrywide campaign by Tsvangirai to bring an end to the factionalism in his party.

Minister's arrest a slap in the face for SADC

THE arrest of MDC-M National Healing Minister Moses Mzila Ndlovu and a Roman Catholic Priest in Matabeleland North for allegedly holding an “unsanctioned” meeting to commemorate victims of the Gukurahundi massacres exposed the ZANU PF arm of government’s determination to suffocate freedom of speech, assembly and association.

It also appeared to be a defiant response to the SADC Troika, which recently ordered Zimbabwe’s coalition parties to stop arbitrary arrests, intimidation and political violence and undermined the inclusive government’s efforts to promote national reconciliation.

The official dailies quoted the police confirming the arrest, adding that Ndlovu also faced other charges of **“communicating falsehoods prejudicial to the State and causing offence to persons of a particular race, religion or tribe** without clarification.

But *The Standard* (17/4) quoted Ndlovu’s lawyer saying his client was accused of allegedly saying that **“the police, intelligence services and the army were being used by President Mugabe to advance his interests”**.

While the official media downplayed the arrests, the private media reported them as having worsened relations between the coalition parties, as evidenced by the boycott of the Independence Day celebrations by the MDC-M leadership, led by Welshman Ncube (SW Radio Africa and *NewsDay*, 18 & 21/4).

Both the government and private media reported 17 other incidents of human rights violations. Nine of these emanated from the MDC-T intra-party clashes carried over from the previous week. The remaining eight incidents were mostly reported to have been committed by ZANU PF and state security agents.

These included:

- The summoning of MDC-T MP and COPAC co-chairman Douglas Mwonzora by the police in Mutare on allegations of undermining or insulting the authority of the President (SW Radio Africa, Studio 7, *NewsDay*, 9, 12 & 13/4).
- The arrest of two human rights activists for holding an illegal meeting in Chipinge (SW Radio Africa, Studio 7 and Radio VoP, 15/4), and
- Coercion of MDC-T supporters to support ZANU PF in Chikomba; and threats against vendors in Mbare for reading the privately owned daily, *NewsDay* (*NewsDay*, 13/4).



WHAT THEY SAID...

“While President Mugabe and Prime Minister Tsvangirai were in Harare marking Independence Day, (MDC-N leader Welshman) Ncube was provoking bloodshed (by travelling to Lupane police station to visit MDC-N’s detained National Healing Minister Moses Mzila Ndlovu). He must be taught how to be Zimbabwean. He must respect national holidays” – Matabeleland North police chief Edmore Veterai (NewsDay, 21/4).

“The ZRP continues to urge the political party (MDC-T) to desist from behaving like warlords and rebels, causing pandemonium in society. Situations where they desire to fuel intra-party and inter-party violence and thereafter put the blame on the police...will certainly never be tolerated” - Police Commissioner-General Augustine Chihuri (NewsDay, 14/4).

“SADC countries must understand that MDC is not a political party but a movement to take us back to Rhodesia and to take South Africa back to apartheid. So the challenge for SADC is...that MDC-T is not a political party that stands for anything that is African (but) indulges in violence...to attract attention (of) the British and American governments ...to intervene in our country... The challenge for war veterans is to understand that...the time has come for them to put up their guards and fight, strengthen ZANU-PF, strengthen defences...against imperial machinations” –“political commentator” Goodson Nguni (ZTV, 11/4, 8pm).

“The time has come for people to embrace indigenization to the full by identifying the sectors which are relevant to their portfolios. The process is now on fast track and everyone should position themselves to board the train and not cry tomorrow” – ZANU PF Politburo member Jonathan Moyo (The Sunday Mail, 17/4).

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Website: www.vmcz.co.zw. Our complaints procedure is available on our website together with the Media Code of Conduct.

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