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Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
Monday, May 2nd – Sunday, May 8th 2011
Weekly Media Review 2011-18

ZANU PF rhetoric poisons Press Freedom Day

AS Zimbabwe joined the rest of world in commemorating World Press Freedom Day, the event reignited fresh media debate on the authorities' failure to deliver a free and diverse media as promised in the Global Political Agreement (GPA).

Comments by some officials from the ZANU PF arm of government were clearly aimed at scuttling Zimbabwe's media reform agenda by advocating even more control over journalistic activity, which triggered particular criticism in the private media.

Spearheading this resistance was Information Minister Webster Shamu who tried to unilaterally outlaw media reforms proposed in Zimbabwe's election roadmap document at an event celebrating the arrival of transmitters for eight "pilot" community radio stations.

The Herald (30/4) quoted him saying **"Let negotiators please read the law so that they do not make suggestions that are lawless, or which require my ministry to behave unlawfully."**

Apart from professing ignorance on the definition of **"state media"** or **"public media"**, claiming he was **"still to be educated"** on what that meant, the minister was reported downplaying the prominent role these media play in the dissemination of hate messages against ZANU PF's perceived opponents and criticising the **"selective"** plans to transform them into genuine public media as envisaged under the GPA.

The media reform proposals call for independent boards and management of public media institutions and licensing of independent broadcasters, among others. But Shamu insisted the state media institutions were **"regulated by statutes"** with **"constituted boards"** that looked after **"their affairs"**.

The private media interpreted Shamu's stance as a negation of Press freedom and media reforms in the country and **"hardly believable coming from a whole minister"** (NewsDay 2/5). They quoted media reform activists and commentators identifying this as a lack of **"political will"** from some **"sections in the inclusive government"** for media reforms, citing the continued existence of hostile media laws such as the Access to Information and Privacy Act and the illegal monopoly of the national broadcaster, ZBC (Studio 7 3/5; NewsDay 2, 3, 4/5; Daily News 4/5 and The Financial Gazette 5/5).

The Daily News (4/5) also reported Shamu as having defended repressive media laws at a function to commemorate World Press Day hosted by the statutory media regulatory body, the Zimbabwe Media Commission. It quoted the minister: **"If the pen is indeed mightier than the sword, then it requires a national management and control system far more elaborate than that which has been developed over several millennia to manage security forces."**

The paper (12/5) also drew attention to recent claims by ZANU PF's former acting minister of information, Bright Matonga that government was not yet prepared to issue new broadcasting licences because it had no capacity to monitor them – an echo of unreformist comments made last year by the Permanent Secretary for Information, George Charamba.

It reported Zimbabwe Association of Community Radio Stations (ZACRAS) contesting Matonga's claims saying it was being used as **"an excuse not to free the country's airwaves"**.

The Daily News (12/5) quoted ZACRAS chair Kudzai Kwangwari: **"Right now they are commissioning ZBC community radio stations, but they are saying no licences should be issued to private players. This is just self contradictory."**

The official media basically ignored civil society's calls for extensive media reforms, limiting themselves to lobbying for the removal of targeted Western travel embargoes imposed on some of their journalists for alleged dissemination of hate speech (ZTV 3/5, 8pm and The Herald 3/5). They also publicised Charamba's threats to ban Western and European journalists from covering events in Zimbabwe in retaliation after ZBC chief correspondent Reuben Barwe was denied a visa by the Italian Embassy in Harare to travel to the Vatican with President Mugabe to witness the beatification of the late Pope John Paul II.

The Herald (3/5), for example, decried the **"needless"** censorship of the state media journalists **"for daring to write and report contrary to the dictates of EU foreign policy"**.

SADC election roadmap divides ZANU PF

THE fallout between ZANU PF and its chief negotiator to the Global Political Agreement (GPA), Justice Minister Chinamasa, over his admission that it was doubtful Zimbabwe would hold elections this year as it needed more time to implement programmes agreed upon by negotiators to the political settlement, made headlines in the week.

The government-controlled media passively reported senior ZANU PF officials such as national spokesman Rugare Gumbo, Simon Khaya Moyo (national chairperson) and Politburo member Jonathan Moyo disowning Chinamasa's comments as **"personal opinion"** not representative of the party (*The Herald* 4/5, *The Sunday Mail* 8/5 and ZTV 10/5, 8pm).

ZTV (10/5, 8pm) aired Gumbo presenting Chinamasa's revelations as an affront, maintaining ZANU PF stood by its congress resolutions that elections can only be held this year and adding that, in any case, only President Mugabe had the power to call for the polls, which he had already done. *The Herald* (4/5) reported Khaya Moyo warning those **"deployed by the party"** against obtaining a situation **"where the deployed party cadres will actually want to show more authority compared even to that of the President"**.

None of the government media's reports sought clarification from Chinamasa on the issue. These just quoted him in retrospect.

Neither did the official media present the fallout as reflective of serious discord in ZANU PF, nor viewed it as undermining the SADC-facilitated negotiations as ZANU PF appeared to be imposing its pronouncements on the nation as if they were government policy.

In fact, *The Sunday Mail* (8/5) obligingly published another tactless article from Jonathan Moyo, which rubbished the ongoing negotiations, risking the spectre of another diplomatic spat with the region, especially South Africa President and SADC facilitator, Jacob Zuma.

The article questioned the logic of the roadmap, dismissing it as a **"charade"** being driven by **"third parties operating outside the law under the treacherous cover of negotiations that are not necessary"**.

Said Moyo: **"These puppets and their masters will not be allowed to reform something they did not form using the cover of the GPA negotiations under misplaced SADC facilitation which the UK government apparently wants to use to dictate regime change in the country."**

The private media viewed the harsh exchanges as a **"reflection of deep-seated factionalism"** in ZANU PF (*NewsDay* 9/5). They also presented ZANU PF negotiators to the GPA as under pressure from securocrats and ZANU PF hardliners to harden their position in the talks (*Dailynews*, *The Financial Gazette*, *Zimbabwe Independent* 4,5,6/5)

State media recycle allegations against Tsvangirai

THIS week *The Sunday Mail* (8/5) reincarnated old allegations against Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai – again accusing him of having lied to SADC leaders during the body's Troika meeting in Zambia that the state had invoked section 121 of the criminal Procedure and Evidence Act chiefly as a weapon to persecute his party members.

The accusations came as the GPA partners prepared for a SADC meeting on May 20 where Zimbabwe's power-sharing problems are scheduled for discussion.

The Sunday Mail report, *Tsvangirai Exposed*, made minor variations to the old accusations contained in its earlier report: *Tsvangirai's tale of lies* (17/4). Both stories were carried as front-page lead reports.

The only fresh angle appeared to be the Attorney-General's compilation of a counter forensic report to be used at the regional summit **“that was set to leave the Prime Minister's credibility in tatters”** as it had unearthed the **“lies”** told by the MDC leader in his **“sensational dossier that caused havoc”** at the Troika meeting in Zambia.

The paper did not fully disclose the contents of the AG's forensic report, said to have been **“made available to SADC through diplomatic channels”**, nor those from Tsvangirai's dossier.

The Sunday Mail report came in the wake of the release of statistics by the police chronicling at least 20 cases of political violence committed by the MDC-T countrywide, mostly ahead of the party's congress in Bulawayo (*The Herald* 6/5; ZBC 6/5, 8pm and 7/5, 7am; and Studio 7 6/5).

Reportedly, the incidents of violence occurred between January and April this year.

Police 'expose' MDC-T violence

The Herald (6/5) published statistics by the police showing the MDC-T as **"topping the national political violence record"** after it allegedly committed more than 20 cases of violence in the first four months of this year, mostly stemming from intra-party fighting ahead of the party's congress on April 30.

No comparative analysis was given of the behavioural records of the party's partners in the inclusive government, ZANU PF and the smaller MDC-M faction.

The police report coincided with private media reports of a renewed flare-up in political violence countrywide, chiefly identifying ZANU PF and state security agents as being responsible against perceived opponents of the party. They recorded 12 incidents.

These included:

- Attacks and displacement of at least 20 villagers in Chimanimani by ZANU PF militia on suspicion they were MDC-T supporters. (SW Radio Africa, *Dailynews*, *NewsDay*, *The Standard & Zimbabwean on Sunday*, 3/5, 4/5 & 8/5);
- Four sculptors at Harare International Festival of the Arts (HIFA) were allegedly picked up by ZANU PF **"thugs"** and taken to the party's provincial offices where they were beaten up because **"HIFA is pro-MDC"** (SW Radio Africa 3/5);
- Arson attacks on property belonging to Luckson Masona, a teacher based at Mwoyoweshumba Secondary School in Mutare, by suspected ZANU PF youths. (*Newsday* 4/5);
- Harassment by state security agents of senior journalists working for *NewsDay* after the car they were travelling in was stopped for 30 minutes in Harare and subjected to a search under **"unclear circumstances"** (*NewsDay* 6/5).
- Random beatings of Chitungwiza residents by some soldiers after one of their colleagues was allegedly killed by a resident in a fight (*NewsDay* 6/5).

WHAT THEY SAID...

“With respect to comments by our colleague in the negotiating team, I don’t understand where this position of (holding elections) some time next year or 2013...is coming from. Surely our negotiators should know better that the position of the party is that we hold the elections this year. I don’t express my individual opinion; I express the views of the party (ZANU PF)... If there is going to be any adjustment, it will have to come from the party” – ZANU PF national spokesman Rugare Gumbo, dismissing Chinamasa’s recent remarks that it was doubtful national polls would be held this year (ZTV 10/5, 8pm).

“Elections this year are out. We need to create a conducive environment and strengthen institutions. There is clear acceptance by all three parties that they need time for doing all the work that needs to be done” – Lindiwe Zulu, South African President Jacob Zuma’s international relations adviser (New Zimbabwe 9/5).

“They (MDC formations) want those in the Diaspora to vote simply because they are able to go out there and address them...We have been barred from visiting those countries and how do they expect us to do the same? Sanctions must go first and if they don’t, I don’t think those in the Diaspora can also vote until they return home” – ZANU PF secretary for legal affairs, Emmerson Mnangagwa (*The Herald*, 4/5)

“I doubt that ZBC in the current political environment can be transformed. The political will isn’t there and I doubt that it will be found in the immediate future. There is no impetus to free the media as a matter of urgency” – Human rights lawyer, Beatrice Mtetwa (*Newsday*, 4/5)

“It is the most frustrating experience of my life to have to negotiate with somebody who lost an election, and then be forced to negotiate an arrangement where the loser comes in through the window in order to claim the same rights as somebody who has won” – Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai (*Newsday*, 7/5)

THANKS FOR YOUR COMMENTS

MMPZ should monitor media coverage of reports that police officers are milking transport operators by demanding bribes on the roads – Anonymous.

Keep up the good work, your media update is good – Brenda, Masvingo.

MMPZ should urge ZBC to stop attacking Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and the two MDC formations and give them the respect they deserve as components of government – Pastor, Harare.

I appreciate your weekly media review; please carry on the good work – Bridget, Masvingo.

- *MMPZ welcomes readers' feedback about our Weekly Media Reviews. Do you enjoy what you read? Is it helpful? Are there issues that you think we overlook? Please send us your comments, either by email at monitors@mmpz.org.zw, or even sms us on our dedicated cell phone number: 0774 432 509.*

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