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**The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
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Weekly Media Review 2011-1**

TOP STORIES

THIS is a review of Zimbabwe's domestic media output over the holiday period since our last report on December 12th.

As the Christmas holiday beckoned, ZANU PF held its customary conference in mid-December, while a little known South Africa-based regional pressure group, Mthwakazi Liberation Front, was launched as a political party in Bulawayo on December 28. Soon after the dawn of the New Year, the smaller formation of the MDC staged its congress and chose a new leadership that saw Welshman Ncube take over from Arthur Mutambara.

The official media promoted ZANU PF's activities, particularly its annual conference, while discrediting the party's coalition partners by mostly exploiting leaked classified American diplomatic comments on local political and socio-economic figures and issues leaked by *Wikileaks*, a whistle-blower website.

The private media provided almost exactly an opposite view, largely portraying ZANU PF in a negative light and marketing its rivals, especially the main MDC formation, revealing the extent of the polarization in Zimbabwe's media.

Also prevalent in the media during the holiday period were statements of political intolerance uttered by politicians from across the political divide, which exposed high levels of tension among the parties to the coalition government that undermined the spirit and letter of the Global Political Agreement (GPA). This coincided with persistent reports of political intimidation and violence against a wide cross-section of Zimbabwean society, particularly ZANU PF's perceived opponents. See Fig 1.

Speculation over Zimbabwe's next elections, fuelled by President Mugabe's call for an early poll, and the ongoing debate over Zimbabwe's ability to conduct them, remained under spotlight too. Although the official media eventually hinted that the proposed elections were likely to be postponed to pave the way for the adoption of far reaching electoral reforms (*The Sunday Mail*, 2/1/11), they suffocated the fact that this sudden "change of mind" was a result of South African President Jacob Zuma's intervention.

Fig 1: Popular issues in the media

Media	Party politics	Wikileaks	Power sharing	Election talk	Rights abuses
Official Press	58	44	10	9	3
ZBC	158	11	4	24	6
Private papers	72	49	62	45	52
Private radios	3	6	10	24	8
Online agencies	7	5	7	5	2
Total	298	115	93	107	71

ZBC assumes role of ZANU PF's publicity department

DURING the festive season the national broadcaster, ZBC, made nonsense of its public mandate to provide its audiences with fair, balanced and accurate information by bombarding them with an avalanche of partisan publicity for ZANU PF, erroneously portraying it as still the only ruling party in the country.

ZBC's conduct also flew in the face of Article 19.1(d), which recognizes all three parties to the inclusive government to be equal partners that deserved ***"balanced and fair coverage for their legitimate political activities"***.

According to MMPZ's monitoring from December 6th, 2010 to January 9th, 2011, ZANU PF received publicity in 155 (98%) of the 158 stories that ZBC allocated to the country's political parties. The remaining three were on the smaller MDC formation, which recently held its congress to elect a new leadership. The activities of other parties, including Zimbabwe's most popular one, the main formation of the MDC led by Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, were censored, giving ZANU PF an advantage over its competitors in the event of the much debated national elections.

ZANU PF's three-day annual conference, for instance, was beamed live on ZBC's main television station on December 17, 2010, devoting at least five hours to the event.

Similarly, ZTV's current affairs programmes such as *Talking Business*, *Zvavanhu*, *Media Watch* and *Melting Pot* were generally used as platforms to promote ZANU PF policies such as black economic empowerment, its anti-Western stance and its role in the country's liberation struggle. These programmes also dismissed ZANU PF's political opponents as unfit to govern, presenting them as "Western puppets" that "lacked liberation war credentials".

In addition, the station aired brain-teasers during news bulletins, including advertorials, which exclusively marketed ZANU PF's role in the liberation war in the run-up to what are supposed to be national holidays such as National Unity Day.

Notably too, was ZTV's continued use of ZANU PF publicity songs by groups The Born Free Crew and the Mbare Chimurenga Choir.

The Born Free Crew's *Network* and Mbare Chimurenga Choir's songs *Nyatsoteerera*, *MuZimbabwe* and *Team* were the most frequently played. They praised President Mugabe's leadership and his party's ideologies.

Language of intolerance

WHILE the Christmas and New Year festive season is renowned in most parts of the world for its spirit of goodwill, MMPZ noted a proliferation of offensive language by senior members of Zimbabwe's political parties against their perceived opponents in both the government and private media during the holidays.

These fanatical statements mostly emanated from speeches delivered at the parties' meetings and conferences, highlighting deep-seated hostilities characterizing Zimbabwe's political landscape.

The official and private media passively reported these statements without analyzing their implications. In the process, they also violated Article 19.1 (e) of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) that prohibits them from publishing statements that ***"may incite hostility, political intolerance and ethnic hatred, or that unfairly undermines political parties and other organizations"***.

For the record, here are some of those politically offensive statements:

"This time around there must be no MDC, as (Prime Minister Morgan) Tsvangirai wanted to sell our country to whites against the objectives of the liberation struggle. All MDC supporters must approach traditional headmen and rejoin ZANU PF while there is still time. Names of those who refuse to repent should be documented for disciplinary action. This must serve as a final warning, as those who thought 2008 witnessed the worst violence since independence are yet to see the true colours of ZANU PF" – ZANU PF campaign team led by Airforce commander Perence Shiri threatening villagers in Mtoko (*The Zimbabwean*, 9/12).

Finance Minister Tendai Biti described ZANU PF as ***"vampires who have gone for two years without blood"*** – (*NewsDay*, 20/12).

"To hell with the British government, asilincengi (we don't want anything from you), after all, you only defeated our forefathers and not us" – Paul Siwela, supporter of the new regional political party, Mthwakazi Liberation Front (*Chronicle*, 29/12).

“We have been too good to malicious people, to countries that seek to destroy us. Why should we have 400 British companies operating freely here, with Britain benefitting? Why should we continue to have companies and organizations that are supported by America and Britain without hitting them back? The time has come for us to revenge...” - President Mugabe addressing ZANU PF supporters at a party conference in Mutare (*The Herald*, 18/12).

“Some of those who got offer letters have been contracting the utilization of that land, in some cases to the same settler farmer who used to occupy the land and to other white farmers. Zvino wapihwa land, nyangwe iri 50 hectares, unotsvaga murungu kuti akushandire? Ipo ndipo patinotora mapfumo (So after being given 50 hectares of land, you decide to find a white man to lease it to? That is when we'll take up arms)” - President Mugabe (*The Herald*, 18/12).

“This time there are no sacred cows, if they (white commercial farmers) deny you access to the lucrative sugar industry, go and invade them, invade their plots and offices... We cannot be strangers at our own wedding. Kick them out. It is better for one black person, his wife and relatives to benefit, not one white individual” - Indigenization Minister Saviour Kasukuwere (*The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 9/1).

Did he really say it?

ALTHOUGH several private media organisations, among them the private radio station, VoP (7/12/10), *The Standard* (12/12/10) and *The Zimbabwean* (16/12/10) quoted ZANU PF national chairman Simon Khaya-Moyo allegedly threatening to ***“crush”*** journalists who reported negatively on the country's security forces, MMPZ has been unable to establish the credibility of the statements from the media that published them. For example, while VoP reports Khaya-Moyo as ***“urging”*** the country's security forces to ***“crash (sic) journalists”*** when addressing ZANU supporters in Umguza, Matabeleland, it never reports him actually saying this. What it does quote him saying is: ***“In some countries if you criticise security forces you won't last a day; you will be crashed (sic). I warn journalists in the private media to stop this because it won't be tolerated.”***

The Standard and *The Zimbabwean* who carried similar statements do not say when or where Khaya-Moyo allegedly said this. *The Zimbabwean*, for example, reported the comment in the context of the ZANU PF annual conference in Mutare, quoting him saying ***“I warn journalists in the private media to stop this (reporting on security forces), because it won't be tolerated and we will hunt them and kill them. You hear them talk about Press freedom. What Press freedom?”***

Press coverage fact-file on parties' campaigns

THE print media basically remained polarised in their coverage of the activities of the political parties despite provisions in the GPA calling on them to provide fair and equitable coverage of the parties' activities. The government papers greatly favoured ZANU PF while the MDC mostly received endorsement from the private Press.

Fig 2. Media coverage of parties' campaigns

Media	ZANU PF campaigns (Positive)	MDC-T campaigns (positive)	MDC-M campaigns (positive)	Other Parties' campaigns (positive)	ZANU PF campaigns (Negative)	MDC-T campaign (Negative)
Official Press	42	0	1	3	0	58
Private Press	29	18	5	1	29	0
Total	71	18	6	4	29	58

Coalition fails to stamp out rights abuses

THERE was no let-up in cases of rights violations during the festive season, a development that could be attributed to the "threat" of fresh elections and high profile political party activities, such as conferences and congresses.

The media recorded 38 incidents. Of these, 36 appeared in the private media and the remaining two in the official media.

Although the private media led in exposing this national scourge, which vindicates fears that Zimbabwe was not ready to hold democratic elections, they undermined the credibility of most of their reports by failing to seek corroboration for the rights abuses.

SW Radio Africa was the worst offender.

Eight of the 10 incidents it broadcast on rights violations were single-sourced and chiefly based on the personal accounts of the station's correspondents or the MDC's assertions of rights violations. Only in the remaining two cases did the station seek more than one source of information. But even then, these reports still lacked verification, either from the police or the victims themselves.

Among these was the allegation that war veterans' leader Jabulani Sibanda had threatened to **"slit the throats"** of villagers in Chikombedzi if they refused to support ZANU PF in the next elections (20/12/10). The report was exclusively based on the account of its correspondent, Lionel Saungweme. It was not clear whether he was present when the threats were issued.

Ends/

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