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Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe

Monday May 16th – Sunday May 22nd 2011

Weekly Media Review 2011-20

Media slow to report SADC rights court mothballing

THE removal of Zimbabwe's power-sharing crisis from the agenda of last weekend's SADC extraordinary summit in Namibia due to the absence of South African President and SADC facilitator, Jacob Zuma, diverted media attention from pertinent developments that emerged at the meeting.

Chief among these was the SADC leaders' decision to extend the suspension of the SADC tribunal for a further year pending another review of its mandate and functions.

The tribunal was already under suspension since last August, triggered by SADC leaders' reluctance to enforce the regional court's 2008 rulings that declared Zimbabwe's controversial land reforms unlawful, which the ZANU PF government at the time refused to honour.

The national broadcaster, ZBC, and most of the private media did not report this important development, which threatens to undermine the court's current mandate to provide justice to SADC citizens when all legal avenues in their own countries have been exhausted.

They only woke up to the newsworthiness of the development several days after the summit. For example, the national broadcaster, ZBC, reported the news three days later, while it took the private electronic media seven days to realise its importance.

Only SW Radio Africa (20/5), *The Herald* (21/5) and *The Sunday Mail* (22/5) provided contemporary reports on the tribunal's suspension.

But *The Herald* (21/5) and *The Sunday Mail* (22/5) reported this news from a ZANU PF perspective. The papers passively quoted ZANU PF Foreign Affairs Minister Simbarashe Mumbengegwi revelling in the decision: ***“So today, we have completely and totally dissolved the tribunal”***.

The government media also presented the rescheduling of SADC's hearing on Zimbabwe's power-sharing problems as a diplomatic victory for President Mugabe without coherently explaining how.

ZTV (21/5, 8pm), for example, reported how President Mugabe had ***“seconded SADC Troika Chair's motion to postpone the meeting”*** in the midst of ***“much noise and lobbying to have Zimbabwe grilled”*** and ***“put in the corner”*** by ***“foreign funded hostile media”***.

Earlier, all ZBC stations (20/5, 8am) reported sources solely attributing the deferment of discussions on the Zimbabwe crisis to Troika Chairman Rupiah Banda's observations of a ***“number of inaccuracies”*** in the Livingstone report without linking it to Zuma's absence.

The private media largely concentrated on publicising the suspension of the discussions, which have now been provisionally scheduled for South Africa in June.

ZANU PF propaganda used to discredit election roadmap

ZANU PF's efforts to discredit negotiations under the Global Political Agreement (GPA), which proposes holding national elections next year, continued in the week.

The official papers widely publicised an interview President Mugabe held with the Namibian-based *Southern Times* newspaper ahead of the recent SADC summit in which he disputed some aspects of the reform agenda spelt out in the GPA.

The papers reported him contesting the time-frame for holding national elections and that the political agreement envisaged the drawing up of a new constitution, among other things. Mugabe also dismissed the GPA's calls for security sector reforms as **"nonsense"** (*The Herald* 19 and 20/5).

The Herald (19/5) quoted Mugabe contradicting Article VI of the GPA that spells out the process of preparing a new constitution, saying: **"As we discussed the GPA, we never had the new constitution of the nature that we are now working on, no. This became a new development after the GPA, though ZANU PF agreed to it."**

Similarly, President Mugabe's argument that the **"GPA and the inclusive government were not supposed to last for more than two years"** saying, **"elections were only delayed because the MDC formations rejected the Kariba Draft"**, was not verified by the paper. The GPA does not have a specific expiry date.

The Sunday Mail (22/5) reported ZANU PF lobbying for the sidelining of Lindiwe Zulu, spokesperson for South African President Jacob Zuma's facilitation team, alleging bias against the party in the interparty talks.

It reported ZANU PF as having **"formally lodged a complaint"** with South Africa's ruling ANC, complaining about Zulu's **"reckless and inflammatory statements"** regarding the succession law in Zimbabwe published in the party's weekly newsletter, *The ANC Today*. Zulu allegedly told the publication that GPA negotiators **"are concerned about the succession law should (President) Mugabe die or retire before the adoption of a new constitution"**.

The Sunday Mail then reported unnamed analysts vilifying her.

One ***“outraged ZANU PF official”*** was reported accusing her of ***“playing a very cheap and dangerous game, which can be played by any fool”***. The official dismissed her ***“as a mere assistant to the facilitator”*** who now ***“wants to speak with a voice stronger than the President of Zimbabwe and...the President of South Africa who is the facilitator”***.

Zulu and the ANC were not given a chance to respond.

ZBC ignored Mugabe’s interview.

But it reported several other ZANU PF officials and their sympathisers also misinforming the nation about the GPA, saying it had expired and that elections had to be held this year without fail.



Did you notice?

THE national broadcaster, ZBC, has so far largely ignored the unprecedented crisis unfolding at Air Zimbabwe that has resulted in the company being suspended from the International Air Transport Association for failing to pay its dues amounting to \$1,7 million and the grounding of its planes.

Only Radio Zimbabwe (19/5) did some probing into the airline’s \$460 million debt, which has crippled its operations, and its efforts to negotiate with regional airlines to ferry stranded passengers in two stories on the issue.

The national ZTV and Spot FM remained silent on the Air Zimbabwe crisis.

RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Pro-democracy activists harassed at summit

THE private media were again at the forefront of exposing rights violations, the latest being the arrest in Namibia of a group of Zimbabwean civil society activists, top human rights lawyers and a journalist.

The private media reported the group as having been arrested and ejected from the just-ended SADC meeting after they were intercepted distributing **“offensive”** flyers near the summit, calling for the regional body to publicly state its commitment to free and credible elections in Zimbabwe (SW Radio Africa, *NewsDay* and *The Daily News* 20, 23/5).

The official media did not view this as a rights violation, preferring to celebrate the unwarranted harassment by Namibian and Zimbabwean security agents.

ZTV (23/5, 8pm), for example, dismissed civic society’s concerns, projecting them as hired thugs and gatecrashers who were being used by the MDC-T in its **“desperate attempt to influence the thinking of the SADC and delay the holding of elections”**.

Similarly, *The Sunday Mail* (22/5) showed no sympathy for the unaccredited **“miserable activists”** who were **“stunned”** and **“interrogated for many hours”** by Namibian police after they **“tried in vain to dish out literature attacking President Mugabe and ZANU PF at the summit”**.

The incident was part of the 13 cases of rights violations that the media carried in the week. Of these, 11 appeared in the private media and two in the official media.

These included:

- The eviction by soldiers of 40 Chiadzwa families (SW Radio Africa 17/5);
- Alleged harassment of MDC-T supporters in Chimanimani by ZANU PF supporters for supporting self-exiled MDC-T treasurer Roy Bennett (*The Zimbabwean* on Thursday 19/5);
- The arrest of seventy-five mourners coming from the burial of MDC-T activist Jack Ndeketeya at Granville Cemetery following clashes with ZANU PF supporters at the Boka Auction floor. (*NewsDay* 23/5).
- The burning of two houses belonging to MDC-T supporters in Mutasa Central by ZANU PF militia (*The Zimbabwean* on Sunday and *ZimOnline* 19, 20/5);
- An arson attack on Chief Mola’s house in Nyaminyami (Mashonaland West) by unknown assailants (ZTV 20/5, 7am) and;
- The petrol-bombing of the home of MDC-T supporter Alois Ndiweni in Mberengwa West by war veterans (Radio VOP 22/5).

What they said

“The government as we speak today is living on borrowed time. Its existence as provided in the GPA has actually expired and the end of its period was supposed to be followed immediately by the holding of elections...” – ZANU PF politburo member Jonathan Moyo (ZTV 19/5, 8pm).

“The current ZANU PF stance on SADC’s position on a roadmap to elections is not only reflective of the fractures that may be in the party. It is also mainly about power entrenchment and the suspicion levels that are simmering within the party” – Political analyst, Trevor Maisiri (*The Financial Gazette* 19/5).

“I know what is written in The Herald, I know what comes out on ZBC and in the Sunday Mail. I think even themselves do not believe what they are writing. If they do then they must be shallow minded people” – Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai speaking at a public policy dialogue held by the Southern Africa Political and Economic Series (ZTV 13/5, 8pm).

“When a section of our society is attacked such as happened when PM Tsvangirai implied that our colleagues in the public media are shallow, we as a union have to defend our colleagues in the public media” – Foster Dongozi, President of the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZTV 18/5, 8pm).

“Prime Minister Tsvangirai has always been a victim and not perpetrator of hate speech. He has been a victim of hostile public media that has consistently and persistently attacked his person and it is regrettable that the ZUJ has not sought to protect him or to censor the responsible journalists and media houses” – Luke Tamborinyoka, Prime Minister Tsvangirai’s spokesperson (*Radio VOP* 22/5/11).

“After 1500hours, we were then told to pack our bags and leave the airport as Air Zimbabwe was no longer flying. We were not even told when we would be refunded our money or when a rescheduled flight would be available” – Unnamed traveler booked to fly Air Zimbabwe (*News Day* 18/5).

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