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Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
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Weekly Media Review 2011-22

ZRP threats fuel police neutrality debate

REMARKS by senior policemen following the killing of Inspector Petros Mutedza in Glen View, Harare, and the subsequent crackdown on MDC-T supporters there, raised fresh questions in the media about the neutrality of Zimbabwe's security forces.

None of the government media's 23 reports independently investigated what exactly transpired or interpreted the police's threats of revenge as having the potential to incite violence against MDC-T supporters.

Neither did they view police calls for the imposition of capital punishment for those convicted of Mutedza's killing as likely to undermine Zimbabwe's judicial process, nor that their utterances had given credence to the perception that the ZRP was partisan.

ZBC (31/5, 8pm & 1/6, 6am) and *The Herald* (1/6) passively reported the police as having **"declared war on people who attack their members"** during a funeral parade for Mutedza. It reported police commissioner Charles Mfandaidza, speaking on behalf of Police Commissioner-General Augustine Chihuri, saying the police would **"descend heavily on political elements bent on making the country ungovernable"**.

In most of ZTV's 13 reports related to Mutedza's killing during the week its presenters did not miss an opportunity to describe it as **"murder"** committed by **"suspected MDC thugs"**, or **"MDC-T hooligans"** a refrain echoed repeatedly in the pages of *The Herald* (30/5 8pm, 31/5 6pm, 8pm, 1/6, 8pm and 2/6 7am and 8pm). Such unprofessional reporting – undoubtedly driven by a desire to discredit the MDC-T – undermines the judicial process and particularly the possibility of a fair trial.

Reports that the police had imposed tough, last-minute restrictions on an MDC-T rally in Highfield, resulting in a poor attendance, and their dismissal of the petrol-bombing at the home of Finance Minister Tendai Biti as a “**political gimmick**” also appeared to reinforce the perception that the ZRP was partisan (*The Standard*, *The Herald*, *Daily News* and SW Radio Africa, 5, 6 & 7/6).

The Herald (7/5) quoted presidential spokesman George Charamba justifying the conditions imposed on the MDC-T rally as “**standard**” while the police described the attack on Biti’s house as suspicious. They claimed that preliminary investigations had shown that the bombing could have had been stage-managed to “**hoodwink**” SADC ahead of its meeting on Zimbabwe this weekend.

The private media also failed to independently investigate the circumstances surrounding the policeman’s death before arrests were made. But they argued that ZANU PF would use the killing as evidence that the MDC-T was a violent party at the SADC meeting and criticized the police for threatening revenge and for urging the courts to impose the death penalty on those responsible (SW Radio Africa, 31/5 and *The Standard*, 5/6).

They reported that such comments were *sub judice* and claimed they exposed the police’s bias, as the police have not called for similar punishment for those responsible for killing hundreds of MDC supporters during previous national elections (*NewsDay* and *Daily News*, 1 & 7/6).



State media step up propaganda against SADC 'roadmap'

AS the weekend SADC summit in South Africa drew closer, the government media stepped up its propaganda campaign against the MDC-T, discrediting its views on Zimbabwe's political crisis, and particularly SADC's election roadmap reforms, which were widely expected to top the summit's agenda.

Although the private media appeared to promote the MDC-T's views, they reported political commentators arguing that its concerns were in line with the provisions of the Global Political Agreement (GPA).

The Herald (7/6) reported a **"high-powered"** ZANU PF delegation, led by Politburo member Jonathan Moyo, as having left for South Africa on a mission to **"set the record straight on the situation in Zimbabwe"**. It expected the group to dispel **"fictitious claims of violence being peddled by MDC-T and its functionaries"**, adding that MDC-T **"continuously fomented violence ahead of international summits in a bid to throw the spotlight on Zimbabwe"**.

The paper also discredited the MDC-T's calls for security sector reforms, as part of efforts to guarantee free and fair elections, on the strength of ZANU PF's argument that there was no need for them, as the issue **"was never part of the GPA"**. No attempt was made to investigate the truth of ZANU PF's claims.

In contrast, *The Zimbabwean on Sunday* quoted political science lecturer John Makumbe urging SADC to insist on genuine security sector reforms. *The Sunday Mail* (5/6) published two front-page reports presenting the MDC-T's calls for political reform in Zimbabwe as part of Western efforts to achieve illegal regime change.

In one, the weekly claimed that **"the much-touted roadmap"** for democratic elections in Zimbabwe, which was being presented as the **"brainchild"** of SADC, was, in fact, **"a foreign initiative to undermine the GPA"**. It claimed that the **"purported"** roadmap was **"originally authored in June 2009"** as part of a British **"Government Work Programme"** by **"a British spy"**, Charles Heatly, who was **"working under the cover of Adam Smith International"**.

The paper claimed its investigations showed that the GWP allegedly authored by Heatly and presented by Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai in Nyanga in June 2009 was the same in every respect as the content of the **"so-called"** roadmap signed by the GPA negotiators on April 22 this year. No credible evidence for this was provided.

The private media quoted a wide cross-section of the Zimbabwean society expressing their expectations of the SADC summit. While these media reported ZANU PF resisting political and electoral reforms, they quoted political commentators, civic organizations and the two MDC-T formations urging SADC to insist on Zimbabwe implementing these reforms, as they were the only way to restore democracy in the country (*The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 5/6).

Private media highlight Mugabe's election date concession

PRESIDENT Mugabe's admission that Zimbabwe might hold general elections next year while addressing chiefs from Manicaland, revived debate about when best the country should do so.

Mugabe said while it was possible for Zimbabwe to hold elections next year, his party still wanted them this year, provoking debate in the private media, which insisted that Zimbabwe had no capacity to hold a credible ballot this year.

The Herald and Chronicle (3/6) passively reported Mugabe saying early elections were necessary to **“terminate”** the inclusive government: ***“We now want this Global Political Agreement to go and this should happen this year. If we fail, then elections should be held during the first few months of next year. What we want are elections this year”***.

Only the private media identified Mugabe's remarks as a significant retreat from his previous insistence that elections must be held this year (*The Daily News* and *The Zimbabwe Metro*, 4 & 5/6).

Remarks by Constitutional and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Eric Matinenga that a new constitution, which the GPA identifies as instrumental in the holding of democratic elections, might not be ready until the end of the year, also appeared to be a setback to ZANU PF's plans for early elections (*Daily News*, 3/6).

Matinenga cited **“incessant delays”** dogging the constitution-making process, caused by funding shortages and political feuding, as the reason why the Constitutional Parliamentary Select Committee (Copac) might not meet its September deadline, a position echoed by his colleague, Edward Mkhosi of the MDC-N.

However, both the government and private media reported ZANU PF spokesman Rugare Gumbo and another Copac co-chairman, Paul Mangwana (ZANU PF), dismissing Matinenga's comments (ZBC, 2/6, 6am and *Daily News* and *The Herald*, 3 & 9/6). Gumbo said: ***“The process shall proceed as anticipated and elections will follow suit”*** (*Daily News*, 3/6).

HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

ARRESTS FUEL TENSION

A POLICE crackdown on the inhabitants of Glen View following the killing of Inspector Petros Mutedza and the arrest of 20 MDC-T supporters there were among 11 incidents of human rights concerns the media recorded in the week.

Of these, nine appeared in the private media, including complaints by lawyers representing those arrested that their clients had been tortured while in police custody, while the remaining two featured in both media.

The private media noted an increase in incidents of rights violations, mostly against suspected MDC-T supporters and residents in Harare's high density suburbs, particularly Glen View and Mbare, following Mutedza's death (Studio 7, SW Radio and *NewsDay*, 31/5 and 2 & 3/6).

Among them were reports that at least 50 people had been evicted from their homes and chased from their informal market stalls by suspected ZANU PF supporters.

The private media also noted a coincidence between what appeared to be mounting resentment of Finance Minister Tendai Biti by President Mugabe and his party in the state media with reports of an alleged attempt on Biti's life last Sunday (SW Radio Africa, *ZimOnline*, *ZimEye* and *NewsDay*, 6 & 7/6).

It came just after President Mugabe attacked Biti for allegedly sabotaging government's efforts to improve people's livelihoods and for trying to usurp his powers (*The Herald*, 3/6).

Other incidents included:

- Attacks on three MDC-T supporters by suspected ZANU PF activists in Highfield, Harare, and the disruption of an MDC-T meeting at Mahoya business centre in Murewa (*The Standard*, *The Zimbabwe On Sunday* and *NewsDay* (5 & 6/6).

WHAT THEY SAID...

“It is quite disturbing to note that opposition political parties and some civic organizations who claim to be masters of democracy and peace are today at the helm of causing violence, maiming and murdering our unsung heroes” – Police Commissioner Charles Mfandaidza, speaking at the funeral of Inspector Petros Mutedza (*NewsDay*, 1/6).

“It’s not a change of policy as such (using maximum force), but we will make sure that every police officer carries a gun for protection...so be warned” – Home Affairs co-Minister Kembo Mohadi expressing the police’s intention to adopt tough measures against political violence (*Radio Zimbabwe*, 1/6, 8pm).

“The objective of security sector reform is to mould a professional non-partisan national defence force and other state security arms into national institutions that respect the will of the people” – Wilfred Mhanda of the Zimbabwe War Liberators Platform (*The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 5/6).

“South Africa is infested with Western sponsored NGOs and media organizations which support the illegal regime change agenda in Harare by peddling falsehoods on behalf of the MDC formations” – an editorial intrusion in *The Herald* (7/6)’s news report on the SADC summit this weekend.

THANKS FOR YOUR COMMENTS

- MMPZ should urge the media to investigate reports that the police are harassing Zimbabweans, especially MDC activists. The police should protect Zimbabwean citizens instead of beating them – *Jefferson*, Harare.
- The media must examine the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission’s conduct during the 2008 elections. It assisted President Mugabe to win the vote by cooking up figures. The media should state these facts correctly and without bias – *Anonymous*.
- Your review is informative. In view of the impending general elections, we want to hear more about the activities of ZANU PF’s opponents. The government of national unity is not about ZANU PF alone, as the state media appears to think. These media should spare us of this monotony...MMPZ should also urge the media to prioritize rural reporting, as it is lagging behind – *GPG*.

WE WELCOME YOUR FEEDBACK

MMPZ is anxious to hear from our readers. We would love to get your feedback about our weekly media reviews. Do you enjoy what you read? Is it helpful to you? Are there issues that you think we overlook? If there is anything that you think we can do to improve our product, we would like to hear from you.

You can contact us either by email at monitors@mmpz.org.zw or you can even sms your comments on our dedicated hotline cell phone number: 0774-432-509. Comments on the stories themselves are also welcome. We look forward to getting your feedback.

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