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Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
Monday June 6th – Sunday June 12th 2011
Weekly Media Review 2011-23

State media peddle fibs about SADC summit

CLAIMS by the government media that SADC leaders had “rejected” the decisions of the regional grouping’s Troika on Politics, Defence and Security in Livingstone, Zambia, during their meeting in South Africa last weekend, sparked heated debate in the media.

The Troika condemned Zimbabwe’s coalition parties for failing to stem political violence and being slow to implement the terms of the Global Political Agreement (GPA).

These media based their claims on President Mugabe and Foreign Affairs Minister Simbarashe Mumbengegwi’s perspective (*The Herald*, 13/6 and ZTV & Radio Zimbabwe, 13/6, 7am & 8pm).

Mumbengegwi said: ***“The summit went on very well, very, very well. Summit only noted the outcome of Livingstone, they did not endorse; Summit noted. And...in diplomatic parlance, you know what ‘noting’ means? It was noted, it was not endorsed”.***

It was on this basis that the government media misleadingly reported the SADC summit as having “rejected” the outcome of the ***“controversial”*** Livingstone meeting ***“that was fraught with procedural irregularities”***. Nowhere in their reports was Mugabe or Mumbengegwi directly quoted saying SADC had rejected the Livingstone report.

In addition to falsely informing their audiences, these media censored or suffocated the resolutions of the SADC summit itself, particularly its demands for the implementation of the GPA; the adoption of the SADC electoral roadmap reforms; and its decision to send a team to assist Zimbabwe’s Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee (JOMIC) in discharging its duties in their news reports.

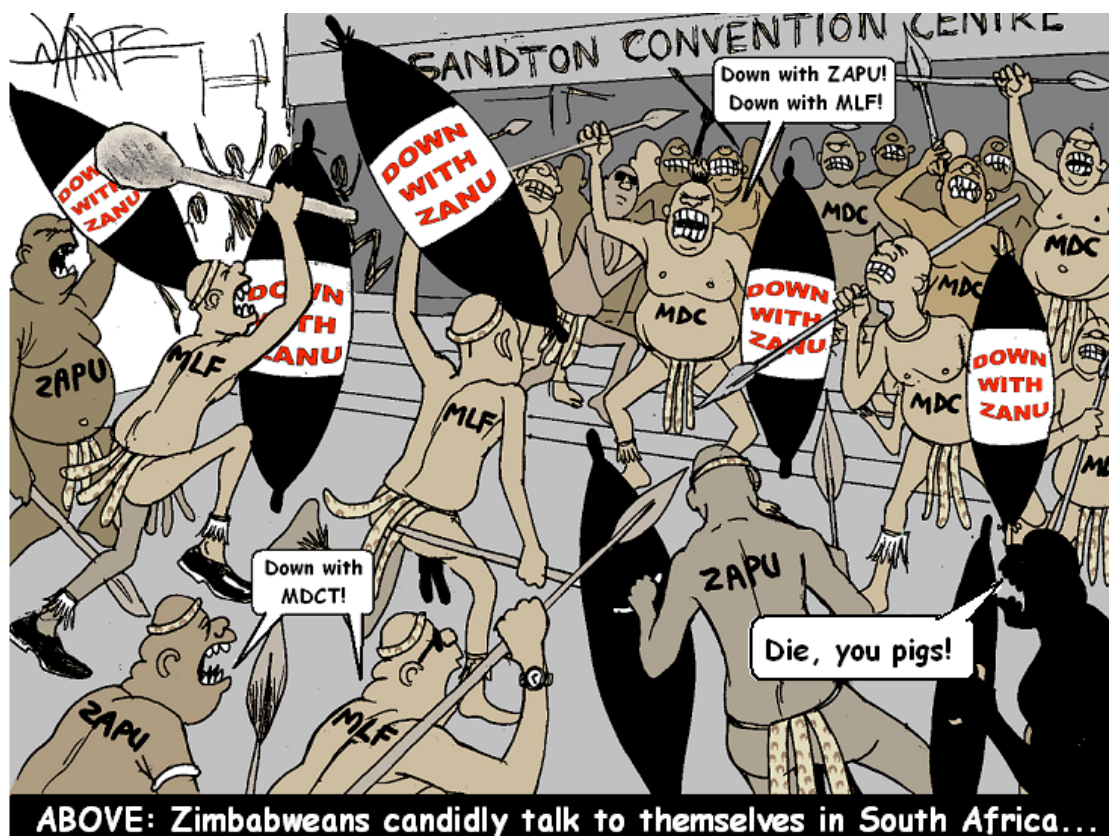
Instead, they gave prominence to ZANU PF's perception that the removal of Western sanctions was the major highlight of the summit, while it ignored calls for security sector reforms and concerns over political violence, as those issues were **"nonsense"** (*The Herald*, 13/6).

The private media presented a more accurate picture of what transpired.

They quoted political commentators, the two MDC formations, SADC officials and members of South African President Jacob Zuma's facilitation team dismissing claims attributed to ZANU PF that the SADC summit had rejected the Livingstone report, claiming that the summit had actually endorsed it (*Radio VoP*, the *Daily News* and *NewsDay*, 13 & 14/6).

Lindiwe Zulu, a member of the South African facilitation team said: ***"Whether you use 'noted' or 'endorsed', it means the same. As far as the summit is concerned, the Troika report presented in Zambia by President Zuma has now been fully endorsed by SADC"*** (*NewsDay*, 14/6).

State media step up violence propaganda



ABOVE: Zimbabweans candidly talk to themselves in South Africa...

MMPZ observed an increase in government media reports attempting to portray Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC-T party as a violent political organization in the run-up to the SADC summit last weekend.

This was evident in the 45 stories these media carried on the issue. Twenty-six of them accused the MDC-T of sponsoring and thriving on violence, citing clashes between MDC-T supporters and other Zimbabwean demonstrators on the sidelines of the SADC summit in Johannesburg and the alleged bombing of Finance Minister Tendai Biti's home. The remaining 19 were follow-ups to the killing of police inspector Petros Mutedza by what the state media claim to be "suspected MDC-T supporters" last month, or regurgitated their own lies about the 2007 petrol-bombing campaign of police stations and other state-owned premises, which led to dozens of MDC-T supporters being arrested by police. The ensuing trials never secured a single successful prosecution and the real offenders remain unknown, but *The Herald* allowed the authors to perpetuate the state media's own lies.

The government media's coverage of the outbreak of violence in South Africa exposed their bias against ZANU PF's political opponents.

The Sunday Mail (12/6) broke the 'news'. It reported the MDC-T's **"culture of violence"** as having taken **"centre stage"** during the first day of the summit, **"severely embarrassing the MDC-T leadership that always accuses ZANU PF of orchestrating violence"**. The weekly reported that the demonstration **"backfired spectacularly when the accusers turned villains"**. It claimed the demonstration, organized by Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CZC), turned violent after leaders of **"the disparate opposition groups"** allegedly **"disagreed on both the content and purpose of the demonstration..."** The paper identified the MDC-T, ZAPU and the **"flag burning"** Mthwakhazi Liberation Front (MLF) as among the participants. It blamed the MDC-T for the violence even if there was evidence in its story showing that MLF might have caused it.

ZTV (13/6, 8pm) prominently reported the MDC-T as having taken its violence **"beyond the country's borders"**. Its heavily editorialized report of the incident claimed that the MDC-T's **"culture of violence reared its ugly head again, this time in South Africa"** where efforts by over 100 CZC activists, **"hired by Mr Morgan Tsvangirai to demonstrate"** at the summit **"were foiled by South African police"**. It accused CZC regional coordinator Dhewa Mavhinga, who organized the protest, of having **"fuelled"** the **"orgy of violent scenes"** by failing to pay the youths a promised ZAR1,000 each. The national television station also claimed that the **"so-called"** CZC leader was **"caught napping as he failed to justify the logic behind the demonstration, which...also left egg on the face of Mr. Tsvangirai"**.

The private media viewed this as a propaganda campaign, deliberately designed to discredit the MDC-T and influence the outcome of the summit.

But they were generally guilty of censoring or superficially reporting the violence that broke out during the demonstration by Zimbabwean exiles.

MEDIA WARS LEAD TO 'SENSATIONALIZED' NEWS

THE welcome competition between the country's daily newspapers to win the hearts and minds of Zimbabwe's reading public appears to have adopted an ugly face with these media resorting to sensationalizing stories and events, especially those of a political nature.

While this problem has always been a feature of the official media, its proliferation in the new, privately owned dailies is a worrying development that compromises their integrity.

This was evident in 20 stories these media carried over a two-week period from May 30th to June 14th 2011. There were 19 such stories in the government papers, many of which tried and convicted suspected MDC-T supporters for **"murdering"** police officer Petros Mutedza.

Also evident was the repeated use of adjectives in the private media, negatively judging politicians or exposing their dislike of them in news stories.

The private media's coverage of the alleged petrol-bombing of Finance Minister Tendai Biti's home by unknown assailants was one such example.

The Daily News (6/6) reported the bombing, which partially damaged the property's Durawall, as **"an attempt on the fiery MDC secretary general's life"** under its front-page lead headlined: *Bid to kill Biti*.

NewsDay (6/6) reported Biti as having **"escaped death"** under its front-page headline: **Biti 'bombed'**, which claimed the explosion **"destroyed a section of a precast wall"**. It remained difficult to believe how this was so considering the fact that the minister was away when the incident happened.

The following day, *The Daily News* (7/6) reported a **"tearful"** and **"emotional"** Biti as saying he was seriously considering quitting Zimbabwe's inclusive government, **"after a powerful explosion rocked his Harare home"**. It reported the **"traumatized"** and **"distraught"** MDC-T secretary general, who is **"usually unflappable"**, as having told the *Daily News* **"in between sobs"** that he **"feared that the country's partisan secuocrats were out to kill him and his family"**.

In other reports, *NewsDay* and *Daily News* (13 & 14/6) reported **"the frail 87 year old"** Mugabe or **"octogenarian"** as having been **"embarrassed"**, **"humiliated"** and **"dressed down"** by South African leader Jacob Zuma at the SADC summit.

Some of these media were also guilty of the insensitive, careless and misleading use of pictures.

The worst case of this was the widespread use of pictures accompanying the story about a deadly fuel tanker blaze in Sunningdale graphically showing the burnt remains of those killed in the tragedy. Not only were these pictures grossly insensitive to the relatives and friends of the victims, they were clearly in bad taste for publications claiming to be 'family newspapers'. *The Sunday Mail* and *NewsDay* (12, 13 & 14) were all guilty of this.

Indeed, the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe received a number of complaints from the public regarding the use of these pictures, and responded by urging these media to adhere to the VMCZ's media code of conduct, which calls on news organizations to conduct inquiries in cases involving personal grief or shock ***“with sympathy and tact.”***

MMPZ joins the VMCZ in condemning this collective expression of bad taste.

In other examples of misleading pictures the *Daily News* (10/6) splashed a picture of soldiers attending a funeral at the National Heroes Acre under its front-page headline: *Military fingered in plot*. The story was on ZANU PF's alleged plans to deploy state security agents across the country to force Zimbabweans to vote for it in the next elections. The picture gave the impression that all members of the army were part of such a “plot”.

The same day, *NewsDay* (10/6) published a picture of Mugabe being helped down the steps of a building in Uganda during an African Union summit last year, accompanying its front-page story: *Mugabe in double climb-down*. The story was about Mugabe having been “forced” into granting his bitter critic, Edgar Tekere, national hero status, and conceding to rescheduling elections that he had previously resisted.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

WHILE the ZANU PF arm of government was reported celebrating that the SADC summit had allegedly ignored the MDC-T's concerns over human rights violations in Zimbabwe, the private media continued to report the problem as still prevalent.

Instead of viewing the problem as a threat to progress, *The Herald* (13/6) simply quoted Foreign Affairs Minister Simbarashe Mumbengwegwi claiming that the issue was ***“not discussed”*** as it was ***“not part of the agenda”***.

The media carried 14 new incidents of rights abuses in the week. Twelve of them appeared in the private media. The remaining two appeared in both. These were on the outbreak of violence between Zimbabwean exiles in South Africa.

Other incidents included:

- The abduction of MDC-T official Timothy Mugari in Chikomba following a ZANU-PF rally addressed by the party's political commissar Webster Shamu, and coercion of Chivi villagers to attend ZANU PF rallies (Studio 7, Radio VoP and *NewsDay*, 9 & 11/6),
- Arrest of two MDC-T councillors, Warship Dumba and Sydney Chirombe, and two other party employees, in connection with the killing of a police officer in Glen View (Daily News, 11 & 13/6), and
- Attacks on illegal diamond dealers and panners in Chiadzwa by state security agents, who reportedly set dogs on them, resulting in dozens being mauled (Radio VoP, 7/6).

WHAT THEY SAID...

“This (outbreak of violence between Zimbabwean protestors in South Africa) is enough evidence, not just to the people of South Africa, but to the entire SADC and Comesa leadership who are here that the MDC-T is a violent party which covers up that violence by playing victim when they are often perpetrators” - Jonathan Moyo, head of ZANU PF’s ***“high powered”*** delegation to South Africa (*The Sunday Mail*, 12/6).

“The SADC Troika Organ is a treaty of the institution and no-one has the right to reverse its decisions...The deliberations of the Troika are final” – SADC executive secretary Tomaz Salamao refuting claims attributed to President Mugabe and his party that the SADC summit had “rejected” a report produced by its organ on Politics, Defence and Security in Livingstone, Zambia, in March (*Radio VoP*, 13/6).

“MDC-T and ZANU PF must grow up, and get over the politics of cheap point-scoring. Whether or not SADC leaders endorsed the Troika resolutions is not important, what is key now is that we have a process, the election roadmap... The rest is an unhelpful ‘me-me’ sideshow which has nothing to do with improving the lives of Zimbabweans” – MDC-N negotiator Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga (*NewZimbabwe.com*, 13/6).

WE WELCOME YOUR FEEDBACK

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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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