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The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
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Weekly Media Review 2011-9

Anti-sanctions propaganda swamps state media

THE ZANU PF-controlled official media gave saturation coverage this week to the party's anti-sanctions propaganda campaign that kicked off with a 'national' anti-sanctions rally hosted by President Mugabe on the outskirts of Harare's central business district.

The national broadcaster, ZBC, flooded its audiences with 225 stories on the topic, while the Zimpapers stable carried 41.

No attempt was made to provide any semblance of balance in any of this massive publicity, which these media used exclusively to romanticise ZANU PF as a people's party fighting to defend the country against the West's economic sabotage and to vilify the MDC-T as accomplices in the imposition of the sanctions.

For example, the official media attacked Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and his party for boycotting the anti-sanctions rally, portraying this as evidence that the MDC-T was unpatriotic, enjoyed the people's suffering and lacked commitment to the Global Political Agreement (ZBC all stations, 3/3, 8pm and official dailies, 3/3). Tsvangirai's explanation that he could not attend a "ZANU PF project" was buried in their main stories promoting the anti-sanctions campaign.

In addition, the official media continued to mislead their audiences about the origins of the targeted sanctions against President Mugabe and his close associates – imposed after widespread human rights abuses and alleged electoral fraud – by exclusively presenting them as vindictive Western retaliation against ZANU PF's land reforms.

Evidently under orders to amplify ZANU PF's propaganda, these media adopted a new mantra by incessantly referring to the West's **"illegal sanctions"** in their news reports, a term they used 319 times during this week alone: [ZBC, 242 times, and official papers 77] without explaining what this meant.

The anti-sanctions campaign also formed one of the major themes at Mugabe's inaugural birthday music gala at the National Sports Stadium. These events coincided with an upsurge in the use of politically intolerant language in the state media.

Mugabe threatens foreign companies

THE government media made no attempt to question the economic implications of President Mugabe's most recent threats to seize majority shareholdings in foreign-owned companies, reportedly in pursuit of the ZANU PF arm of government's anti-sanctions war.

Both the government and private media quoted Mugabe expressing his party's intentions to take over companies whose home governments had imposed sanctions on Zimbabwe. He claimed that more than 400 British companies still operated in Zimbabwe and singled out Barclays and Standard Chartered banks, and mining giants Anglo American and Rio Tinto (*The Herald*, 3/3) for special mention.

Speaking in Shona at the anti-sanctions petition rally in Harare, Mugabe said: ***"I told (Indigenization Minister Saviour) Kasukuwere that the empowerment programme should start with these companies...we must take them over"*** (*The Herald*, 3/3).

None of the official media viewed these comments as undermining the goals of the Global Political Agreement that seeks to restore economic stability and encourage foreign investment.

Notably, the threats came at a time the government was preparing to host a major international investment conference (*The Herald*, 5/3).

Mobile phone operator hijacked

DESPITE its monopoly on the broadcast media sector and domination of the print media in the country, the ZANU PF arm of government enlisted yet another state actor, the mobile phone operator *NetOne* this week by reportedly sending its subscribers unsolicited messages persuading them to support its anti-sanctions campaign.

The official media censored this development. Only the private media exposed this abuse and expressed concern on the grounds that it violated people's privacy and gave ZANU PF an unfair advantage over its political opponents ahead of national elections (*NewsDay*, 7/3).

NewsDay also reported how ZANU PF had barred the MDC-T from using Zimbabwe's leading private mobile phone service provider, Econet Wireless, from communicating its election campaign messages in the run-up to the discredited 2008 presidential run-off and threatened to cancel Econet's operating licence (*NewsDay*, 7/3).

CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?

IN AN attempt to prove that ZANU PF's anti-sanctions campaign was gaining widespread local and international support, the official media carried a number of stories that seemed to stretch the imagination.

These included:

- ZTV's report (5/3, 8pm) claimed that more than **"1.4 million people"** had attended ZANU PF's anti-sanctions rally in Harare, a limited area bounded by the Harare Magistrates Court premises to the East and Rekai Tangwena Road to the West. Independent estimates of the attendance were more realistic, putting it around **"20 000 people"** (*The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 6/3).
- Spot FM, (5/3, 1pm) reported ZANU PF national chairman Simon Khaya Moyo claiming that Germany was now opposed to the EU's targeted sanctions following a meeting with Germany's ambassador to Zimbabwe, Albrecht Conze. The station passively reported Moyo apparently misrepresenting Conze's comments that his country was **"looking to consolidate excellent relations with Zimbabwe"** and would **"invest"** in Zimbabwe's infrastructural development to mean that Germany was **"taking a stand"** against sanctions and had adopted a **"conciliatory path with Zimbabwe"**. Earlier, *The Daily News* online agency (3/3) carried an interview with Conze, whom it reported denying his country was lobbying for the removal of sanctions, saying: **"Germany's position is the EU's position"**.
- The *Sunday News* (6/3) published a story that added to the confusion. It reported that **"illegal sanctions"** had resulted in Zimbabwe being **"struck off"** the register of African countries meant to benefit from developmental projects funded by the German Ministry of Cooperation.

The distortion of facts by the state media and ZANU PF appeared to have attracted indignation within the international diplomatic community, as evidenced by letters of complaint or clarifications by some Western ambassadors. Among these was correspondence from US ambassador Charles Ray, whose letters were published by most sections of the media, including *The Herald* (4/3).

CHIHURI BLAMES MDC-T FOR VIOLENCE

ALL the media reported Police Commissioner-General Augustine Chihuri's evidence on the recent outbreak of violence in Harare and other parts of Zimbabwe during his appearance before a joint sitting of the Parliamentary Committee on Defence and Home Affairs and the Senate's Thematic Committee on Peace and Security.

They quoted him blaming Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's party for the fresh spate of violence, saying of the 121 arrests made in the 36 cases of violence recorded so far this year, 101 were MDC-T members, while the remaining 20 were from ZANU PF (*The Herald & NewsDay*, 4/3). Chihuri was also quoted singling out senior MDC-T officials such as Deputy Prime Minister Thokozani Khupe, Home Affairs co-Minister Theresa Makoni and Deputy Youth Development Minister Tongai Mathuthu, Nyanga North MP, Douglas Mwonzora, and House of Assembly committee chairman, Paul Madzore, as among the culprits.

However, there was no follow-up comparative analysis of Chihuri's statistics, given well-documented private media and civic society accusations of the police's selective application of the law when dealing with ZANU PF's political rivals.

But *NewsDay* (4/3) did report him telling the parliamentary committees that the MDC-T committed violence every time the EU met **"to court"** its **"attention"** so that sanctions would remain in place. Chihuri also claimed that the violence was **"well planned"**, as it **"usually coincided with President Mugabe's international trips"**, adding that he was **"unaware"** of any senior ZANU PF official who had been involved in violence.

These extraordinary comments didn't attract any media investigation.

But notably, of the 34 incidents of rights violations recorded in the media in the week, 30 carried in the private media all identified ZANU PF and state security agents as offenders, while the remaining four published in the state media blamed the MDC-T.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

THE upsurge in rights violations also began to attract condemnation from the international community, among them the US, Germany and the UN (Studio 7, SW Radio Africa, Radio VoP and *Daily News*, 2, 4 & 5/3).

The incidents included:

- The burning of 34 homes belonging to MDC-T supporters by suspected ZANU PF militia in Buhera and the abduction of MDC-T activist Patrick Kamanga in Mbare. However, these claims were only based on MDC-T allegations (SW Radio Africa, 28/2 & 1/3).
- Alleged torture of former MDC MP Job Sikhala while in police custody on kidnapping charges, and the arrest of MDC-T Senator Samuel Khumalo at a Bulawayo police station for illegally possessing mbanje. Khumalo had allegedly gone to the police station to file a report on malicious damage to property after his car was stoned by a “gang of youths” over an undisclosed **“misunderstanding”** (SW Radio Africa, *The Herald* and *Sunday News*, 28/2 and 1 & 6/3).
- Arrest of 21 WOZA members in Bulawayo for organizing “unsanctioned” meetings (*NewsDay* 2/3).
- Attacks on *NewsDay* vendors by ZANU PF supporters during the anti-sanctions campaign rally in Harare (*NewsDay* & SW Radio Africa, 3 & 4/3).

What they said...

“These arrests appear to be part of a growing crackdown on civil society and members of the political opposition, and are a clear sign that the establishment of a consolidated democracy in Zimbabwe is still very far from assured” - UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay expressing concern about the continued detention and reported ill-treatment of 45 members of civil society, facing treason charges (*Afrik-news.com*, *Freedom-now.org* and *The Zimbabwean*, 1 & 3/3).

“We take great exception to the biased, mischievous and partisan stance that the person of the High Commissioner has taken over the years with respect to our country” – Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa responding to Pillay’s observations (*New Zimbabwe.com*, *ZimOnline* and Studio 7, 2 & 3/3).

“Petitions are great things. On a given day, thousands of petitions are circulating in the US. But a petition becomes a wretched thing when only one section of the population is allowed the right to express its views publicly, while others seeking the right to assemble, petition, and demonstrate are arrested and tortured” – US ambassador Charles Ray commenting on ZANU PF’s campaign to mobilize Zimbabweans to sign its anti-sanctions petition (*The Zimbabwean*, *NewsDay* and *ZimOnline*, 3 & 4/3).

Thank you for your comments

Please continue to make noise about police partisanship and shame the likes of Chihuri and company - *Anonymous*.

MMPZ please look at NIC/NEC CAWZ employees and employers. So many interesting stories - *Anonymous*.

Coverage in Rimuka, Kadoma is limited. I will be glad if you may consider this issue. However, I enjoy your read but I always cherish it - *Teawise*.

**Sms your comments on our dedicated hotline cell phone number:
0774 432 509.**

Ends/

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