

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/zimbabwe-wave-of-harassment-of-independent-17-10-2012,43547.html>

Africa - Zimbabwe

Hostile climate

Wave of harassment of independent journalists

17 October 2012

Reporters Without Borders is alarmed by a recent wave of arrests of journalists in Zimbabwe and urges the authorities to stop trying to intimidate independent privately-owned media and to take measures against those responsible for physical attacks on reporters.

"This sudden wave of lawsuits and incidents involving the police does not bode well for the coming months," Reporters Without Borders said. "Journalists must be guaranteed the freedom to cover political stories without fear of abusive criminal prosecutions. We are very worried about the judicial harassment of independent journalists and media in the past few weeks."

The latest incident was on 13 October when two reporters for the privately-owned *Daily News on Sunday*, **Tendai Kamhungira** and **Bethule Nkiwane**, were threatened and attacked by the bodyguards of visiting South African politician Julius Malema, the former head of the ruling ANC's youth wing, when they tried to interview him.

The bodyguards forced them to delete the photos they had taken to illustrate their report and then seized their camera's memory card. A complaint has been filed with the police.

Five days before that, on 8 October, *Daily News* editor **Stanley Gama** and deputy editor **Chris Goko** were briefly arrested in connection with a report claiming that parliamentarian Munyaradzi Kereke may have faked his family's abduction for political purposes.

The arrests followed a series of threats by Kereke in recent weeks against the two journalists, who are now facing criminal libel charges and a demand for the absurd sum of 25 million dollars in damages.

Another journalist, **Kudakwashe Matura**, was arrested on a libel charge on 8 September in connection with a report in the *Kariba News* newsletter and is due to appear before a criminal court on 19 October.

The police raided the premises of *African Open Media Initiative (Afromedia)*, a Harare-based video news production company, on 26 September, detaining at least 10 journalists and seizing computers and video editing equipment on the grounds that they were not properly licensed.

The journalists were released the next day without being charged, but *Afromedia's* editor, **Sifelani Tsiko**, and two of its other journalists have been forced to report regularly to a police station ever since. The equipment still has not been recovered.

The raid could be seen as a warning to Afromedia, which has not been registered by the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ). The BAZ tends not to recognize or issue licences to media that do not support President Robert Mugabe's Zanu-PF party.

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