

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/zimbabwe-journalists-still-being-harassed-25-05-2013,44675.html>

Africa - Zimbabwe

Hostile climate

Journalists still being harassed as elections loom

25 May 2013

The new Zimbabwean constitution that President Robert Mugabe promulgated three days ago guarantees more democracy and freedom of expression, on paper at least, and Reporters Without Borders hopes that it will reduce the negative effect of the draconian laws currently in effect.

As a result of Zimbabwe's repressive legislation, criminal charges are often brought against journalists just for doing their job. This has been seen yet again in recent cases of arrests and harassment.

The new constitution also opens the way for elections that have been awaited for years. President Mugabe wants them held as soon as possible and his party, Zanu-PF, thinks they could be held on 29 June. But the power-sharing government's prime minister, Morgan Tsvangirai of the opposition MDC, wants several essential reforms adopted first, including media freedom reform.

"Aside from highlighting the disagreements and obstacles that have existed at the highest level ever since the power-sharing government's formation four years ago, the conditions posed by Tsvangirai draw attention to the urgent need for news providers to be guaranteed the right to work freely and safely," Reporters Without Borders said.

"The new constitution is a step forward but no satisfactory, transparent election is possible if journalists are prevented from working properly. In both Harare and in the provinces, Zimbabwean journalists, especially those who work for the privately-owned media, are the victims of harassment campaigns while journalists with the state-owned media are controlled by the government."

On World Press Freedom Day, on 3 May, Reporters Without Borders pointed out that Mugabe is still on its list of 39 "Predators of Freedom of Expression" and drew up an indictment accusing him of suppressing freedom of expression, exercising strict control over the state media, constantly harassing the print media and being the architect of an extremely repressive media legislation. [Read the indictment.](#)

Arrests and harassment

In one of the latest examples of abusive arrests, **Dumisani Muleya**, the editor of the *Zimbabwe Independent* weekly, **Owen Gagare**, one of his reporters, and the newspaper's secretary were arrested on 7 May for publishing "lies" in a front-page story by Gagare in the 26 April issue.

All three were held for seven hours in a Harare police station before being released. The two journalists were interrogated about their sources for the story, which said Tsvangirai had met secretly with senior military officers ahead of the coming elections.

The police were meanwhile threatening another *Zimbabwe Independent* reporter, **Dingilizwe Ntuli**, with a jail sentence for an article criticizing Harare's police chief.

The privately-owned newspaper *NewsDay* has also been the target of police harassment. **Ropafadzo Mapihidze**, a *NewsDay* reporter based in Masvingo, 300 km south of Harare, was summoned and questioned by the local police in February about one of her articles.

Daily News editor **Stanley Gama** was summoned to Masvingo the following month and asked to reveal his sources for an article about a resumption of terrorist activities in the area. Gama is currently accused of libelling a Zanu-PF representative in a report about the alleged rape of an 11-year-old girl.

Often threatened and interrogated and sometimes prosecuted, independent media personnel are hounded by the national police, the security forces and the Central Intelligence Organization, which follow orders from Mugabe and his aides.

Judicial dangers and repressive legislation

The two *Zimbabwe Independent* journalists have been formally charged by the police with "publishing or communicating false statements prejudicial to the state," which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison and the possibility of a heavy fine.

The criminal defamation legislation allows individuals to bring complaints against media and journalists before the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC), which monitors the media. Under the 2002 Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), the ZMC can close media that act "imprudently." This provision is above all used when journalists cover cases of alleged corruption.

Information minister Webster Shamu reiterated the government's position on media freedom and the protection of journalists at a news conference at Zanu-PF headquarters on 10 May: "I want to repeat that this country came about through the barrel of a gun. It cannot be taken by a pen, never."

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