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Africa - Zambia

Tense campaign

Pressure on media not to cover opposition election campaign

19 January 2015

Reporters Without Borders condemns attacks on media pluralism during the campaign for tomorrow's presidential election in Zambia due to the ruling Patriotic Front's harassment and threats against several news outlets.

Media coverage has also been very partisan during the campaign, with the main opposition party, the United Party for National Development (UPND) filing a complaint against the *Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC)* for failing to cover the rallies of its candidate, Hakainde Hichilema.

PF activists stormed *Lukulu FM*, a community radio station in Western Province, on 4 January after it broadcast a UPND campaign spot. According to station manager **Munukayumbwa Mundia**, the PF activists said "the government will sort out everyone at the station" after PF won the election.

Both state and privately-owned media "took to extremes" in their election coverage, freelance journalist Sydney Mungala told Reporters Without Borders. "The public media is government-controlled and heavily pro-PF, while the private media took an extreme stance towards opposition," he said.

"These attacks on Zambian media because of their presidential election campaign coverage are unacceptable, said Cléa Kahn-Sriber, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Africa desk. It is true that the government condemned some of the acts of intimidation by ruling party members, but the fact that they recurred and remain unpunished suggests that they may have had tacit approval. We urge all political parties to tolerate media coverage of the political activities of rival parties."

Kahn-Sriber added: *"We also urge the authorities to permit free and unimpeded coverage of the election activities, including coverage of tomorrow's voting and the announcement or results."*

The Post, a privately-owned newspaper based in Lusaka province, was threatened by Kennedy Kamba, the head of the PF youth wing, in late December after running a story about the PF. "What will they do if we beat their journalists at our meetings?" Kamba said.

Radio Walamo, a station based in the northern town of Mpulungu, said it was told by PF parliamentary representative Freedom Sikazwe in December that it would be closed and its staff would be dismissed if it did not stop covering the activities of the region's opposition parties and their election spots. Sikazwe subsequently denied making the threat, which the station's staff decided to ignore.

Youth and sports minister Chishimba Kambwili, PF deputy secretary general Anthony Kasolo and other government officials stormed into the *ZNBC* news room on 23 November and banned staff from broadcasting any information about opposition parties on threat of instant dismissal. Reiterating *ZNBC's* neutrality, the station's news and current affairs director, **Kenneth Maduma**, condemned this abuse of authority, which information minister Joseph Katema eventually also condemned on behalf of the government.

PF representatives previously subjected the *ZNBC* newsroom to a similar invasion on 14 November with the aim of getting the station to focus its election coverage more closely on PF secretary general and presidential candidate Edgar Lungu although, as one of its journalists privately recognized, *ZNBC* was already providing little coverage of his rivals.

Zambia is ranked 93rd out of 180 countries in the [2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

