

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/zimbabwe-new-crackdown-targets-daily-news-08-12-2011,41529.html>

Africa - Zimbabwe

Activists released

Detained Media Monitoring Project staff freed on bail

20 December 2011

Reporters Without Borders notes that three detained representatives of the Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe – advocacy officers **Fadzai December** and **Molly Chimhanda** and **Gilbert Mabusa**, a member of its Public Information Rights Forum Committee – were released on bail on 16 December in the southern city of Gwanda.

Arrested on 5 December, the three human rights activists were granted bail of \$50 each by Justice Nicholas Mathonsi of the High Court

However, they still face charges of “participating in a gathering with intent to promote public violence, breaches of the peace or bigotry”. They are also accused of undermining the authority of, or insulting, President Robert Mugabe. They are due to appear in court again on 15 January.

In another case, freelance journalist **Tapfuma Machakaire** was taken in for questioning on 16 December in Bulawayo while he was covering a meeting of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions.

He was reported to have been arrested for taking photographs while the police were dispersing the meeting. He was released several hours later without charge.

8.12.11 - New crackdown targets Daily News and Media Monitoring Project

Reporters Without Borders is outraged and alarmed by a new crackdown in the past week on independent news media and free speech activists in Zimbabwe. The offices of the Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe (MMPZ) were raided, its director was arrested and three of its members are still being held in the southwest of the country. Two journalists with *The Daily News*, an independent Harare-based newspaper, were also detained for several hours.

“Ever since the national unity government’s installation in February 2009, Zimbabwe has swung between spells of relative freedom and returns to the past,” Reporters Without Borders said. “This week’s intimidation, searches and harassment targeting independent media and those who defend free expression show that the authorities are taking a tougher line. They are trying to discourage journalists from doing their job and restrict their ability to inform the public.

“Zimbabwean journalists enjoy no protection. The country’s draconian media legislation has not been relaxed. The police and intelligence services still cling to their old repressive tendencies. We urge the authorities to let journalists work, to free all of the MMPZ members still held, and to drop all the charges against them.”

MMPZ director **Andrew Moyse** was arrested in his Harare office on 6 December by five members of the Law and Order section of the police on suspicion of “publishing or communicating falsehoods prejudicial to the state” under section 31 of the Codification and Reform Act. After being held for several hours at Harare police headquarters, he was released

in the evening.

The police seized documents, DVDs and videos in a search of MMPZ headquarters the same day. According to their search warrant, they were looking for material with information about an armed uprising in the west of the country in the 1980s.

Three MMPZ representatives – **Gilbert Mabusa**, a member of its Public Information Rights Forum, and advocacy officers **Fadzai December** and **Molly Chimhanda** – were arrested in the southwestern city of Gwanda on 5 December for organizing a civic education workshop in Gwanda on 24 November.

They have been charged with violating section 25 of the Public Order and Security Act by failing to notify the police of their intention to organize the workshop, although it was not a public meeting, and with “participating in a gathering with intent to promote public violence, breaches of the peace or bigotry” under the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act.

They are also accused of distributing illegal material in the form of a DVD that urges the media to help ensure that elections are peaceful by providing fair, accurate and balanced coverage of the elections campaigns of the different parties.

The three free speech activists have remained in custody ever since their arrest. A bail hearing is scheduled for tomorrow.

The harassment of the MMPZ was preceded by police and judicial attempts to intimidate the staff of *The Daily News*. Reporter **Xolisani Ncube** was arrested at the newspaper at 9:15 a.m. on 2 December and was taken to Harare police headquarters. When editor **Stanley Gama** later went to police headquarters with his lawyer, Alec Muchadehama, in response to a summons, he was also arrested. Ncube and Gama were finally released that evening.

They have been charged with libel under the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act in connection with an article about local government minister Ignatious Chombo that was published in early November and was headlined “Chombo brags about wealth.”

Last month, the police ransacked the premises of *The Standard* on 11 November and, four days later, arrested editor **Nevanji Madanhire** and one of his reporters, **Nqaba Matshazi**, in connection with a 6 November article reporting that a health insurance company owned by Munyaradzi Kereke, a senior advisor to the governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, was facing collapse.

The two journalists were brought before judge Sandra Mupindu and were released on bail pending trial on 20 December on charges of with stealing documents from the health insurance company and criminal defamation of Kereke. The police went back to *The Standard* on 18 November saying they wanted to speak to Madanhire in connection with an article published on 1 October.

Kereke, the health insurance company owner, has meanwhile sued *The Standard* for 9 million dollars in damages.

Photo of a news-vendor in Harare (Jekesai Njikizana / AFP)
