

The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
Monday January 31st 2011 – Sunday February 6th 2011
Weekly Media Review 2011-5

Contents

1. State Media Steps Up the Violence Propaganda Lie
2. What Tsvangirai Said
3. Sanctions Fiction
4. The Scramble for Town House
5. Confusion Reigns Over 'Diamonds' Salaries
6. Political Violence Spreads

State media steps up the violence propaganda lie

THE FRESH wave of organized violence that has erupted in Zimbabwe's capital and its suburbs in recent weeks has provided the state-controlled media with another opportunity to intensify its propaganda offensive against Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and his MDC-T party.

Just as they did in their 2007 "terrorist bombing" propaganda campaign leading up to the 2008 elections, and before that, with the "anthrax terror campaign" ahead of the 2002 presidential election, ZBC and its television news broadcasts are leading a new state media war on ZANU PF's old political opponents in an effort to publicly discredit the MDC-T ahead of fresh elections that President Mugabe has stated must be held this year.

Now, as then, these media are being provided ample support by senior ZANU PF officials and the police in blaming the MDC-T for this most recent spate of violence.

This time, the revolutions in North Africa, Tsvangirai's comments about these events, and the European Union's impending annual review of its targeted sanctions appear to be the incentive and the excuse to portray the MDC-T as a violent party with no evidence yet, beyond police accusations, to support the claim.

The fear of spontaneous national uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt spreading to Zimbabwe appears to have been a catalyst in this latest wave of unrest, which the private media and many civic groups have blamed on ZANU PF supporters and officials.

Although stories of politically motivated violence and intimidation around the country have been consistently reported in the private media for many weeks stretching back before Christmas, the latest reports talk of threats, intimidation and “clashes” between rival party supporters in Harare’s suburbs as ZANU PF invades the MDC-T’s urban strongholds as part of its election campaign.

These culminated 10 days ago in the violence reported in Mbare and Epworth and coincided with a well-organized ZANU PF demonstration against Harare City Council, ostensibly for slashing urban maize crops.

While the state media refused to identify the political affiliation of the demonstrators then, the spark that provided the state media with the opportunity to open the propaganda floodgates appears to have been Tsvangirai’s comments to an international news agency about events in North Africa on January 28th.

These were deliberately and dishonestly distorted by ZANU PF officials to mean that the MDC-T party and its leader – together with its Western masters – were agitating for violent, unconstitutional “regime change”.

These observations were then repeated and amplified in the state media, which adopted this description to re-energize ZANU PF’s old allegations portraying the MDC-T as a violent party seeking illegal regime change.

While the police initially avoided attributing blame for the latest violence that resulted in the looting of shops in the Gulf shopping complex of Harare’s CBD, ZTV’s reports in its bulletins on February 8th corroborated this perspective of the violence that has shocked the nation.

ZTV (8/02 8pm) quoted police spokesman Wayne Bvudzijena commenting on the recent violence, saying: ***“Police records show that 11 cases of violence have this year been recorded, with the MDC-T being implicated while Zanu PF sympathizers were the targets,”***

He added: ***“The MDC-T is an active participator and instigator of violence... It is clear that the MDC is orchestrating the political violence in which they cry victim ... Recent statements by the MDC leadership on the issue of violence appear to suggest that any degeneration of order is welcome in the country. Such language is not expected of leaders. It boggles the mind why some politicians harbour ascendance to leadership through violence destroying the same people they seek to lead...”***

This allowed ZTV’s reporter, Tafara Chikumira, in his report of the violence and looting that affected Harare’s CBD, to introduce the topic with the following grossly unprofessional comment: ***“The MDC-T party is known for its quest for violence...Only last week...Mr Morgan Tsvangirai’s plan to incite members of his party to stage an unsanctioned demonstration against the establishment was thwarted by the country’s security forces”.***

His comments referred to an earlier piece of complete fiction reported on ZBC (all stations 3/2) that claimed ***“a plan by...Tsvangirai to address his party’s youths at Town House and incite them to carry out violent demonstrations against the government flopped yesterday.”*** (Spot FM, 8am). It claimed ***“confirmed reports say...Tsvangirai had planned a march from Harvest House to Town house to address his party’s youth league under the guise of addressing urban transport operators and touts”*** and ***“incite them to follow the Tunisian and Egyptian-style of violent demonstrations the government...”*** which ZTV later said ***“...he is ironically part of”***. No evidence to support any of these statements was ever presented.

ZBC reported the police as ***“thwarting”*** the ***“unsanctioned”*** meeting.

The official media also accused suspected MDC-T supporters of ***“petrol-bombing”*** stalls belonging to a ZANU PF official at Mbare’s Siya-So market without providing a shred of evidence (*The Herald*, 7/2). They then reported senior ZANU PF Mbare official Innocent Maseko warning: ***“We want the opposition leadership to teach their youths to stop violence. They are indulging in violence...but when we retaliate they put the blame on us”***.

What Tsvangirai said

Asked by *Fox News* on the sidelines of the World Economic Summit in Davos, Switzerland, to express his views on events in North Africa and how they related to Zimbabwe, Prime Minister Tsvangirai said: ***“There are two issues. One is the general resentment of autocratic regimes, the manner in which these governments have stayed in power forever-and-ever. I think people resent that; naturally...What we are witnessing here is a general suppression of the people. People are demanding more freedoms and there is nothing wrong with that...To me, when people take their rights and start demanding more rights, there is nothing wrong with that, including in Zimbabwe...”***

MMPZ recorded 18 reports of violence in Harare, Chitungwiza and Epworth since Tsvangirai's interview. Ten of them appeared in the private media, while the remaining eight featured in the private media.

All the incidents in the official media attributed the violence to either Tsvangirai's statements or his supporters, while those in the private media, mostly blamed it on ZANU PF and state security agents.

Ironically, while the state media linked the violence to Tsvangirai's comments, MMPZ observed that the latest wave of violence in Harare and surrounding areas started in December 2010, according to our monitoring of the media's output.

MMPZ recorded 38 incidents since December 4th when ZANU PF and MDC-T youths clashed in Chitungwiza (*The Standard*, 5/12/10), which was later followed by a reported attack on informal traders at Mupedzanhamo flea market in Mbare on suspicions of being MDC supporters (*ChangeZimbabwe.com* and *NewsDay*, 11 & 12/12/10).

Thirty-three of these incidents appeared in the private media, while the remaining five featured in the public media over the two-month period.

The official media's obsession with portraying the MDC-T as responsible for the violence resulted in it failing to investigate its real motive and the political affiliation of those involved in the current wave of violence.

For example, ZTV (7/2, 8pm) and *The Herald's* report (8/2): *Looters hit city shops* exonerated ZANU PF youths from looting Harare's Gulf Complex during a demonstration against what they said was the **"slow implementation of indigenization policies"**. They attributed the looting to some **"rowdy elements"** that allegedly **"hijacked"** the demonstration.

The youths reportedly intended to march from their party's Harare provincial headquarters near Fourth Street to Town House to protest against Harare City Council's decision to award a parking tender to a South African company, Easipark, instead of a local one.

These media quoted Harare province police spokesman James Sabau, saying he could not identify the political affiliation of the looters. He added that the police had arrested eight people, comprising **"some known Mbare criminals who were on the police wanted list"**.

ZTV's account of this incident (7/2, 8pm) directly accused MDC-T supporters of hijacking the ZANU PF demonstration and **"targeting"** shops that belonged to ZANU PF supporters, leaving behind foreign-owned shops.

While the official media blamed the MDC-T for the violence, the private media insisted that ZANU PF was responsible.

SW Radio Africa (8/2), for example, identified ZANU PF's Indigenization Minister Saviour Kasukuwere as **"the man behind the mob"** that committed the latest wave of violence in the capital. It quoted an unnamed source claiming that Kasukuwere hosted a meeting at his Harare residence where a plan was hatched to send party youths **"to demand total empowerment"**.

Sanctions fiction

CLAIMS by the government weekly, *The Sunday Mail* (6/2), that the European Union was considering lifting its targeted sanctions exposed the government media's tendency to fabricate and exaggerate issues to suit their editorial wishes.

As the EU prepared to review its sanctions against Zimbabwe, the weekly reported France as having been actively calling for the removal of the sanctions in what it viewed as a sign of ***“deep divisions within the bloc”***.

Under its front-page lead: *Divisions rock EU over Zimbabwe sanctions*, the paper based its claims on a *Wikileaks* cable released on February 4th, revealing that three senior French government officials had ***“pressured”*** former British Foreign Minister Malloch-Brown during a meeting in 2009 to convince his government to change its stance.

Apart from the fact that this report was based on what transpired in 2009, it remained difficult to imagine how one country would convince a grouping of 27 countries to remove sanctions. It also remained a puzzle how France's alleged differences with its 26 counterparts over the issue amounted to “deep divisions” within the EU.

Its editorial comment amplified this lie. It claimed that Britain's ***“hard-line stance”*** on the Zimbabwean sanctions had allegedly become ***“untenable, as countries all over the world continue questioning the logic behind this evil embargo”***. It described France's purported attitude as an indication of ***“how these sanctions have become extremely unpopular across the world”*** and how ***“the French and many other countries in Europe are refusing to join (Britain's) racist chorus”***.

The scramble for Town House

POLITICAL tensions between the ZANU PF and MDC-T arms of government appeared to have spilled into the management of local councils, especially in Harare, with ZANU PF accusing Harare City Council of working against the spirit of government's indigenization programme.

Both the government and private media reported ZANU PF youths as having been incensed by Harare municipality's decision to award a parking tender to a South African company, EasiPark, and the perceived domination of retail office space by foreigners, particularly Nigerian and Chinese traders (*The Herald*, 8/2).

While all the media reported ZANU PF's concerns, which culminated in a violent demonstration against Harare city councillors last Monday, the official media did not view ZANU PF's actions as interfering with municipal affairs.

Neither did they view the party's behaviour as having the potential to tarnish Zimbabwe's international image and undermine government's efforts to lure investors.

None of the media however, investigated whether council had violated its by-laws in awarding the parking tender and permitting foreigners to operate retail shops in Harare.

Instead, *The Herald* (8/2) attempted to discredit the Harare municipality's decision to award the parking tender to EasiPark when it claimed that some senior council officials had **"shareholdings"** in the company and **"have employed their friends, girlfriends and party campaign managers"** without substantiating their claim.

CONFUSION REIGNS OVER 'DIAMONDS' SALARIES

PRESIDENT Mugabe's promise that government would increase civil servants' salaries using proceeds from the Chiadzwa diamond fields was used by the state media as another example of Mugabe's concern for the plight of those in need.

Mugabe made the promise while addressing Zimbabweans living in Ethiopia on the sidelines of the AU summit (*The Herald*, 31/1 & ZBC, 1/2, 8pm). He made this commitment after Mines Minister Obert Mpofu had reportedly told him that his ministry had conducted a third sale of the controversial gems and would declare a **"large"** dividend to Treasury, which would **"assist"** in **"raising"** civil servants' salary levels, including his.

ZBC (1/2, 8pm) quoted representatives of civil servants' unions **"applauding"** Mugabe for his stance, which they said was an indication that he was **"a considerate and visionary leader who is concerned with the well-being of civil servants"**.

At the weekend, it emerged that Mugabe's promise to improve salaries for civil servants could be unrealistic after Finance Minister Tendai Biti declared that treasury had not received money from any diamond sales (*The Standard*, 6/2).

Biti said: **"Diamonds are being sold but there is no accountability. We are not getting anything"**.

Mpofu hit back saying he had **"a written letter from Biti acknowledging receipt of the undisclosed sums of money to be used in paying civil servants' salaries"**.

ZimOnline (2/2) quoted unidentified analysts questioning Mugabe's motive, suggesting that it could be part of ZANU PF's efforts to garner support ahead of national elections.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE SPREADS

THE government media finally paid significant attention to the ongoing wave of politically motivated violence in Harare and other parts of the country, which they had previously ignored.

This was because they found a way to blame it on the MDC-T following Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's interview with *Fox News*, in which they claimed the Prime Minister had incited Zimbabweans to overthrow their government violently.

The media recorded 35 fresh incidents of violence. Twenty-one of them appeared in the private media, while the remaining 14 featured in the official media.

Eighteen of the incidents occurred in Harare and its satellite towns.

Among the incidents were:

- Alleged attacks on at least five MDC-T activists by suspected ZANU PF supporters in Mbare. All of them sustained injuries, two of them seriously (SW Radio Africa & *The Zimbabwean*, 1 & 3/2).
- Alleged attack on ZANU-PF Harare provincial youth chairperson Jimu Kunaka by suspected MDC supporters. Kunaka reportedly sustained serious injuries (ZBC, 5/2, 8pm).
- The eviction of MDC-T stallholders by ZANU-PF supporters, who also destroyed some of their wares, at Siya-so in Mbare. (*NewsDay*, 5/2).
- Reports that ZANU PF supporters had ordered taxis and minibuses to play their party's music and display its flags in Harare (SW Radio Africa, 4/2), and
- A police raid on church premises in Harare's Glen Norah suburb where more than 50 families sought refuge after fleeing their homes in Mbare, following the latest spate of violence there (Radio VoP, 9/2).

SMS us with your feedback

MMPZ is anxious to hear from our readers. We would love to get your feedback about our weekly media reviews. Do you enjoy what you read? Is it helpful? Are there issues that you think we overlook? If there is anything you think we can do that will improve our product, we would like to hear from you.

You can contact us either by email at monitors@mmpz.org.zw or you can even sms your comments on our dedicated hotline cell phone number: **0774 432 509.**

Comments on the stories themselves are also welcome. We look forward to hearing from you.

The MEDIA UPDATE was produced and circulated by the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe, 9 Knight Bruce Road, Milton Park, Harare, Tel: 263 4 741816 / 778115, E-mail: monitors@mmpz.org.zw For previous MMPZ reports, and more information about the Project, please visit our website at <http://www.mmpz.org/>

