

The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
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Weekly Media Review 2010-25

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THE TOP STORIES

REPORTS alleging that two senior government ministers, ZANU PF's Didymus Mutasa and the MDC-T's Co-Minister of Home Affairs, Theresa Makone, had intimidated the police in an effort to obtain the release of Mutasa's son, Martin Mutasa, from custody, provided some spice in a week that was again dominated by the Constitutional Parliamentary Committee's chaotic management of its constitutional outreach consultation programme. The surprise was that this shocking news appeared as the front-page lead story in *The Herald* where ministers are rarely – if ever – accused of such allegations.

Although all the media continued to publicize the administrative nightmares plaguing COPAC's exercise, the state-run media censored a wave of political intimidation against a cross-section of Zimbabwean society, mostly those living in rural areas, aimed at coercing people to support ZANU PF's position on the new constitution. Apart from publicizing the threats – and some violence, the private media quoted analysts and civic organizations arguing that the problem would undermine the credibility of COPAC's exercise.

Fig 1: Top stories in the media

Media	Constitutional reforms	Chiadzwa diamonds	Intimidation of the police	Human rights
Public media	48	19	5	5
Private media	53	23	8	28
Total	101	44	13	33

COPAC threatens CSO outreach observers

ATTEMPTS by the Constitutional Parliamentary Select Committee (COPAC) to discredit independent attempts by civil society to monitor the progress of COPAC's public consultation exercise added a new twist to the state-controlled media's coverage of the constitutional reform programme.

Seven of their 48 stories quoted COPAC distorting civic organizations' role and dismissing reports of violence during the exercise. Eighteen (38%) were on logistical and administrative problems dogging the programme, nine covered some outreach meetings, eight were on ZANU PF campaigns and six were on calls by special interest groups for the protection of their rights in the new national law.

The Sunday Mail (4/7) reported COPAC saying it had **"identified"** more than 480 people **"sponsored"** by civic organizations to **"undermine"** its constitutional reform programme. In its front-page report, *Bogus COPAC monitors on the loose*, the weekly reported COPAC accusing civic groups of running **"parallel"** outreach programmes aimed at **"advancing external interests"**. COPAC alleged that civic monitors were **"openly discrediting"** the exercise by **"spreading malicious"** and **"misleading information"** about it in addition to **"masquerading as COPAC monitors and observers"** and **"using false identification to carry out illegal activities"**.

The Sunday Mail reported COPAC co-chairmen, Paul Mangwana and Douglas Mwonzora, as having made the remarks during a press conference in Harare on Friday. The paper also reported Mangwana appealing to the police to arrest the civic monitors and police spokesman Wayne Bvudzijena promising that the police would do so if they suspected that the monitors were **"bent on discrediting"** the exercise.

While the government media quoted COPAC's managers denying reports of violence across the country (*The Herald*, 2/7), the private media insisted that violence related to the constitutional consultation exercise was prevalent.

They recorded 10 incidents in 28 stories illustrating this. The private media quoted civic organizations and commentators expressing concern over the problem and criticizing COPAC's earlier decision to bar journalists from covering its public meetings, which the state media censored. One of the civic groups, the Zimbabwe Journalists for Human Rights (ZJHR), described the move to silence the media as **"repressive and typical of agents of political parties hell-bent on excluding the media from its activities to escape public scrutiny and accountability"** (*The Zimbabwe Independent*, 2/7).

***NewsDay* struggles to catch up**

THE return to the streets last month of an independent daily newspaper for the first time in seven years was a remarkable turn of events in Zimbabwe's long struggle to revive the country's suffocated media environment. Certainly *NewsDay* has provided Zimbabweans with a very welcome alternative to the daily diet of propaganda that pervades the state-controlled papers.

However, MMPZ's monitoring of the content of *NewsDay* and *The Herald* between Monday June 30th and Wednesday July 7th 2010 reveals that the new daily is still struggling to find its feet editorially. In general, *The Herald* still provides a significantly better coverage of local news stories of non-political issues, such as disasters and accidents, sport, business, local government activity, service delivery, human-interest stories, entertainment, and civil and criminal court cases.

Apart from the usually heavily biased opinion pieces and the distortion of news stories covering political developments – particularly relating to the MDC-T – and central government activity in relation to ZANU PF's performance, notably the Chiadzwa diamond saga, MMPZ's findings reveal that *The Herald* provides more general information on a whole range of stories relating to Zimbabweans' every-day lives.

Of course, Zimbabweans also have to seek alternative sources of information relating to unflattering reports of political violence and the excesses of the security forces, and investigative stories about graft in the ZANU PF arm of government for example.

Such omissions and distortion are the very reason why Zimbabweans are crying out for as many credible alternative sources of information as they can find and one new paper cannot fill the demands of Zimbabwe's information-hungry public.

But during the period monitored *The Herald* published 556 stories. Ninety-one (16%) of them were main news stories, 46 were editorials [comments (nine), opinion pieces (19) and news features (18)], business (78), crime and court stories (62), human-interest stories (five) and entertainment (20). Two hundred and fifty-four stories (46%) were on sports news, the bulk of which were on the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa.

Of the 378 stories *NewsDay* published during the same period, 55 (15%) were main news reports. Forty-two were editorials [opinion pieces (17), comment (nine) and news features (16)]. Twenty-four were on business, crime and court reports (29), human-interest stories (two) and entertainment (25). The 2010 World Cup was also the reason why *NewsDay* devoted most stories to sports news, which got 201 (53%) stories.

The front-page stories of *The Herald* and *NewsDay* on Monday July 5th exposed sharp differences in the news values of the two papers. *The Herald* gave front-page lead status to the death of 19 people along the Harare-Bulawayo Road in an accident involving two buses that were traveling to Harare and a broken-down haulage truck near Chegutu. Although the paper spoiled an otherwise good report by splashing an insensitive front-page picture of dead bodies lying in a police truck, it gave the news the prominence it deserved.

In contrast, *NewsDay* led its paper with news of US President Barack Obama's tightening of sanctions against President Mugabe and his allies under its front-page lead: *Obama goes after Mugabe*. The report was about Obama's inclusion of Mugabe and his associates on a list of individuals it accused of funding global terrorism. The

story, which was hardly a surprise given the widely known frosty relations between the two countries, did not deserve lead status, ahead of the terrible double bus accident, which is certain to have generated greater local interest.

The Herald has also been doing better in its coverage of sports news, providing detailed, accurate and up-to-date sports news, which appears to be one of the reasons why Zimbabweans still buy the paper despite the political propaganda contaminating its opinion pages and some of its news stories. *NewsDay*'s failure to match *The Herald* in sports news coverage was illustrated by its failure to publish news of Zimbabwe tennis star Cara Black's victory at the Wimbledon lawn tennis championships in England where she won the mixed doubles title with her partner Leander Paes of India. Black's exceptional victory was at least reported in *The Herald* (5/7).

News of police accusations takes public by surprise

THE Herald's extraordinary front-page lead story (2/7) reporting on police complaints that Presidential Affairs Minister Didymus Mutasa and new Home Affairs co-Minister Theresa Makone had attempted to influence the course of justice by demanding the release of Mutasa's son, Martin, and nephew Temba Mliswa gave rise to intense public curiosity and speculation.

The curiosity was not so much over the alleged actions of the ministers, or even the allegations against the accused, who were arrested on June 28th on charges of fraudulently seizing shares from a private company. The chief source of curiosity and speculation was the prominence the paper gave to its story – and why it was missing from ZBC's news bulletins.

Very rarely has the irregular conduct of senior government officials attracted such attention by the state-controlled press in the past; former Minister of Finance Chris Kuruneri being perhaps the last example some five years ago, when he was accused of externalizing foreign currency.

The Herald's initial story gave wide publicity to a statement by police spokesman Wayne Bvudzijena accusing the two ministers of having violated Section 184 (1) of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act by "intimidating" the police, attempting to "**interfere**" with investigations and "**defeating**" and "**obstructing**" the course of justice.

Although *The Herald* (3/7) quoted Mutasa the next day denying having interfered with police investigations, the public were left to wonder about the political implications of this unprecedented publicity.

Mutasa was reported describing the allegations as "**nonsense**" and insisted that he had only visited the three Harare police stations in question to find out why his son had been arrested.

ZBC only reported the granting of bail to businessman Mliswa and his co-accused, which the state revoked (ZTV & Spot FM, 1/7, 8pm).

The private media of course, followed up the story and quoted Mliswa denying having fraudulently acquired the shares. He was reported accusing police commissioner-general Augustine Chihuri of being corrupt and masterminding his arrest (*NewsDay* & *The Zimbabwean*, 1 & 2/7).

Dishonesty plagues Chiadzwa ‘truth’

OFFICIAL announcements by Mines Minister Obert Mpofu that Cabinet had allegedly approved the sale of Chiadzwa’s controversial diamonds after the Kimberley Process group had given Zimbabwe “the green light” to do so were the focus of the state media’s coverage of this badly misrepresented saga.

ZTV (30/6, 8pm) and *The Herald* (30/6) quoted Mpofu saying Cabinet had approved the “**immediate**” sale of Chiadzwa diamonds after he had presented a report on the KP’s meeting, where he claimed most delegates, including KP chair Israel, the World Diamond Council and the EU had “**supported the decision to allow Zimbabwe to sell its diamonds**”. However, an appeal by Finance Minister Tendai Biti, a week later, for the KP to allow Zimbabwe to sell its diamonds “**as the delay is affecting ordinary Zimbabweans**” betrayed Mpofu’s lie that the KP had given Zimbabwe the go-ahead to auction the gems (*The Herald*, 7/7).

The private media quoted KP members stating that the organization had not approved the sale of Chiadzwa diamonds because there had been deadlock over the decision at its meeting in Israel.

Apart from quoting the World Diamond Council expressing concern over Mpofu’s misrepresentation of the KP’s position, the *Independent* (2/7) quoted an unnamed senior government minister saying Mpofu was also in “**trouble**” for misleading the nation that Cabinet had endorsed the sale of the diamonds.

HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

THE government media continued to conceal incidents of political violence, most of which appeared to be connected to the constitutional outreach consultative exercise.

Their five stories were mostly based on COPAC’s denial of the prevalence of the problem.

In contrast, the private media reported 13 fresh incidents of violence. Ten of them were linked to the outreach programme. The remaining three were mostly about the invasion of white-owned farms by ZANU PF supporters.

Among the incidents were:

- The assault of three members of civic organizations monitoring outreach consultations by suspected ZANU PF youths in Mashonaland West and the arrest of three others in Manicaland for allegedly practicing journalism without accreditation (SW Radio Africa, *ZimOnline*, Studio 7, *NewsDay*, *The Zimbabwean*, 28, 29 & 30/6 & 1/7).
- Burning of a granary belonging to an MDC supporter, Edward Fore, in Mudzi for opposing the Kariba draft constitution (*The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 4/7), and
- The invasion of four white-owned farms in Manicaland by suspected ZANU PF supporters and the arrest of a commercial white farmer, Mike Odendaal, in Chipinge for allegedly refusing to vacate state-acquired land (*NewsDay* & *The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 3 & 4/7).

MOST POPULAR VOICES

COPAC co-chairmen, Paul Mangwana and Douglas Mwonzora were the most frequently quoted individuals in the government media.

Mangwana was quoted 12 times while Mwonzora was heard nine times. Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa (seven), President Mugabe (six) and Mines Minister Obert Mpofu (five) also competed for attention. Mangawana and Mwonzora were quoted defending COPAC's outreach programme, accusing civic organizations of undermining it and denying reports that the exercise was marred by violence. Chinamasa was quoted accusing the European Union of undermining efforts to restore relations with Zimbabwe, while Mpofu was heard "being economical with the truth" about the KP meeting and the Cabinet's decision over selling the diamonds. Mugabe was quoted urging Zimbabweans to draw up a constitution safeguarding national interests.

Mwonzora (13 times) was the most quoted individual in the private media, followed by Mpofu (eight), president of the World Diamond Council Eli Izhakoff and Global Witness activist Anne Dunnebacke (seven times each), police spokesman Wayne Bvudzijena (six) and businessman Temba Mliswa (five).

Mwonzora was heard defending the constitution consultation process, while Mpofu falsified the KP and the Zimbabwe government's positions on Chiadzwa diamonds. Izhakoff and Dunnebacke were quoted refuting Mpofu's claims that the KP had approved the diamonds. Bvudzijena was quoted warning Mutasa and Makone against intimidating the police. Mliswa was heard alleging that police chief Chihuri had connived with his rivals to arrest him.

What they said...

"The ZRP views seriously the behaviour of the two ministers (Didymus Mutasa and Theresa Makone) which sought to interfere with police work, particularly as the ministers sought to protect accused person(s) facing charges of seizing property outside the law and threatening others" – police spokesman Wayne Bvudzijena (*New Zimbabwe.com*, 2/7).

"The atmosphere has been conducive and meetings have been held in an environment of peace. No incidences of violence have been recorded. We are seeing national healing in the process, with members of different political parties sitting together and speaking their minds" – COPAC co-chairman Paul Mangwana denying reports that the constitutional outreach programme was gripped by violence (*The Herald*, 2/7).

"This intimidation and harassment of activists undermines Zimbabwe's efforts to form a new constitution with public consultation and it is also a worrying reminder of the organized violence that took place in 2008" – Amnesty International official Erwin van der Borgh (ZimOnline, 2/7).

Ends/

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