

THE DAILY NEWS



Established 1999

TELLING IT LIKE IT IS FOR WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

Thursday, 3rd May, 2007

IN EXILE

Press Freedom, Safety of Journalists and Impunity in Zimbabwe

By Geoffrey Nyarota

Founder and Editor-in-Chief of the banned Zimbabwean newspaper, The Daily News, Geoffrey Nyarota here writes about his experience as a Zimbabwean newsman and his fears for the colleagues he was forced to leave behind.

In the aftermath of the Mugabe government's takeover of Zimbabwe Newspapers in 1981, the performance of the company's publications declined. Circulations fell as the papers spewed out propaganda in lavish praise of a government that was increasingly accused of corruption, abuse of power and maladministration. The founding of the Daily News in 1999 provided much-needed relief to a nation tired of newspapers that routinely churned out propaganda, while sweeping rampant official corruption, abuse of human rights and gross mismanagement of the economy under the carpet.

Having adopted the motto, "Telling it like it is", The Daily News investigated and exposed corruption among the ruling elite and condemned government's excesses and abuses. The paper gave a new and much needed voice to an oppressed people. The public was ecstatic. Half-way through 2000, just a year after launch, the paper became the largest selling national newspaper, peaking at 129,000 by June. Meanwhile, sales of the government's own flagship, The Herald, plummeted from 160,000 to 50,000 over the same period.

While readers were jubilant, officials at the Ministry of Information were far from celebratory. They were angry. The President was furious. He branded us as traitors and puppets of the West. The ferocious veterans of Zimbabwe's war of liberation, used by government to spearhead the campaign to dispossess the white commercial farming community of land, condemned The Daily News. They staged demonstrations against the

paper. Journalists working for The Daily News were subjected to harassment, abuse, violence and arrest.

The Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) hired an agent to assassinate me.

I was arrested on a total of six occasions, mostly on spurious charges. On one occasion, they came for me under cover of darkness, well after midnight. They were incensed that

The Daily News had reported that the police used official vehicles to cart away goods looted from a farm invaded by the war veterans.

The Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) hired an agent to assassinate me. Handled personally by a nephew of President Mugabe, the would-be assassin developed cold feet and exposed the plot. Officials in the much-feared CIO were mortally embarrassed when the agent's picture was splashed on the front page of The Daily News, together with a detailed account of his murderous assignment.

As the popularity of The Daily News escalated, so did government's animosity towards the paper. A group of war veterans and youth activists of Mr Mugabe's ruling party lobbed a hand grenade through a plate glass window on the ground floor of the building which housed The Daily News. The building was deserted over the weekend. Damage to a curio shop where the grenade



Bombed printing press of The Daily News



Geoffrey Nyarota, winner of the UNESCO Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize in 2002. His book: 'Against The Grain, Memoirs of a Zimbabwean Journalist' was published in South Africa last year.

landed on the ground floor was extensive. There was a large crack on one wall in my office immediately above the curio shop. There was no doubt as to the target of the attack.

The violent campaign to silence The Daily News having failed, the paper was, in due course, infiltrated.

The Minister of Information, Professor Jonathan Moyo, was the mastermind of the government's propaganda campaign. He frequently launched vitriolic attacks on the independent press. On Friday, January 26, 2001 Moyo appeared on television.

"The Daily News has become a threat to national security and must be silenced once and for all," he pronounced somberly.

Two nights after Moyo's dire warning, there was a massive explosion at the factory housing the Daily News printing press. Armed saboteurs had entered the factory under cover of darkness and attached powerful limpet mines to the printing press. The explosion reduced both the press and the building to a pile of scrap metal and twisted roofing material, never to print another issue of The Daily News.

Much to the surprise of the paper's anxious readers and to the chagrin of the perpetrators of the dastardly attack, the next issue of The Daily News was back on the streets in time, thanks to the intervention of hastily contracted commercial printers.

The registration number of the vehicle used by the assailants was recorded by our security guards and handed over to the police.

"On this case," a police officer told me after establish-

DAILY NEWS TIMELINE

- ◆ 1999: Launched
- ◆ 2000-2001: Editors, journalists arrested several times
- ◆ Jan 2001: Printing press bombed
- ◆ 2002: New media law passed
- ◆ July 2003: Appeals against media law
- ◆ Sep 2003: Closed
- ◆ 24 Oct 2003: Court rules newspaper should be licensed
- ◆ 25 October: Back on the streets, closed again
- ◆ 19 Dec 2003: Court ruling upheld, police occupy building
- ◆ 21 Jan 2004: Court orders police out
- ◆ 22 Jan: Daily News back on sale
- ◆ 5 Feb: Court rules reporters must get accreditation from the media commission
- ◆ 6 Feb: Daily News stops publishing

...continued from first page

ing the identity of the owner, "we cannot help you." Today, five years later, the matter remains unresolved.

The violent campaign to silence The Daily News having failed, the paper was, in due course, infiltrated. A series of internal disturbances rocked the newspaper, as a newly-appointed Chief Executive ran on a collision course with employees and management, culminating in strike action which drove the paper off the streets for a week. When I tried to mediate between him and workers, he accused me of siding with staff and summarily dismissed me. As if acting on cue, the police mounted a renewed offensive against me. Without the protection of The Daily News and its lawyers, I had become vulnerable. While I was in hiding in the countryside, the police repeatedly visited my home at night.

I returned to Harare just in time to pick up my bag and an airline ticket and fled to South Africa. The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists made arrangements for me and my family to proceed to the United States of America. In February 2003, I was offered a fellowship at the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University. The Zimbabwe government banned The Daily News immediately thereafter.

'*Against the Grain, Memoirs of a Zimbabwean Newsmen*', a book whose manuscript I started working on at Harvard, was published in South Africa in 2006. It is the story of the trials and tribulations of the independent press in Zimbabwe under the dictatorship of Mr Mugabe. It is also the story of a revolution that lost its head while a country that was formerly the bread basket of southern Africa degenerated into a basket case itself after only two decades of independence.

With the book project out of the way, I launched *theZimbabweTimes.com*, a news website on Zimbabwe. Relying on a network of correspondents who previously worked for the now defunct Daily News, the website seeks to keep Zimbabwe's burgeoning diaspora community abreast of major developments back in their troubled land. A large number of visitors to the site are based back in the country where they have no other independent source of news on a daily basis. Sadly, access to the internet is low on the African continent.

My greatest regret as Managing Editor of The Zimbabwe Times is that, as violence escalates in Zimbabwe, I cannot guarantee my courageous and enterprising correspondents in Zimbabwe safety in a media climate where government abuses journalists with total impunity. This was also my most painful experience as Editor-in-Chief of The Daily News.



How Times Have Changed

By Sandra Nyaira,
ex-Political Correspondent with the Daily News.

It is that time of the year once again when the world takes some time to talk about issues around press freedom. World Press Freedom Day was to me nine or ten years ago just another day. It had no significant meaning for me as a young journalist. All I did on the day was attend an event organised by affiliates of the United Nations in Zimbabwe and write an article for the news organisation I worked for. And that was it... no reflections whatsoever.

My male colleagues probably remained behind to enjoy one or two free beers and use the opportunity to network.

I knew the day was meant to remind, not only the government but individuals, companies and many other organisations of the crucial role played by a thriving independent free press in the strengthening of democracies, and even in developmental issues. At that time, things were looking up in Zimbabwe: the independent and the state media were both thriving and massive gains were being recorded in the development of the private press. Our rights as journalists to work freely were largely unhindered, or so I thought.

To me, that role was my God-given right and there was nothing, I thought, that could ever infringe upon that. Having trained to become a journalist in a very different Zimbabwe than we have now, I could never have imagined that today I would be writing this article from a foreign country after the vibrant independent daily newspaper I worked for, The Daily News, was forced to close shop by the Zimbabwe government.

As I write this article today, colleagues I worked with on the newspaper are nursing painful wounds inflicted on them by the police in Zimbabwe. They were wounded while doing

their work exercising that right that I naively thought was God-given, especially after my uncles and aunts lost their lives fighting for an independent and free Zimbabwe during the 1970s liberation war.

Tsvangirai Mukwazhi, an award-winning photojournalist, Luke Tamborinyoka and William Tagwirei Bango, all formerly with the popular Daily News have been in hospital after brutal beatings meted out on them by the police on March 11, as the Zimbabwe government moved to thwart efforts by the opposition to hold a prayer meeting for the country under the Save Zimbabwe Campaign banner.

Other journalists from Zimbabwe, notably Gift Phiri, a freelance journalist, are also nursing their wounds after being caught in the crossfire between the police and pro-democracy activists. The situation is bleak with media space shrinking all the time with the closure of independent newspapers or the taking over of papers by the government through the dreaded Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO).

I joined The Daily News in 1999 as a Political Correspondent after three or so meetings with the founding Editor-in-Chief, Geoff Nyarota. I worked for the Zimbabwe Inter-Africa News Agency (Ziana) before that. Things in the media had started changing by this time and it was clear for all to see that the

Zimbabwe government had made serious mistakes that were bleeding the country. There was massive corruption that went unreported in the absence of an independent daily newspaper. Inept government policies, the use of archaic legislation to oppress the people and related issues all saw the downward spiralling of people's standard of living. Everything was changing for the worse and the state media largely told one side of the story.

Enter the The Daily News with the crème of Zimbabwe's journalism in the newsroom and experienced editors making sure Zimbabweans and the world got a daily dose of independent news about events in a vibrant independent media. Freedom of expression and that of our press remain severely limited by intimidation, unjust arrests, impunity for perpetrators and related issues.

With the launch of the newspaper coming in the same year as the formation of the vibrant MDC followed by the government's first ever massive election loss in the Constitutional Referendum of February 2000, journalists had to lose their right to report freely and the government of Zimbabwe did not leave any stone unturned.

The Zimbabwe government had to strike fear into the hearts of the journalists. We were a nuisance and threats



Stop Press: Daily News bombed

ZIMBABWE CRISIS

90,000 homes destroyed in 2005
(UN, 2005)

700,000 forcibly evicted in 2005
(UN, 2005)

83% live below US\$2 per day
(UN, 2005)

Inflation over 1,500% and food inflation
close to 2,000% (IMF, 2005)

Lowest life expectancy in the world
(WHO, 2005)

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were coming in hot and fast from unknown people. We had to be out of the way and efforts by state security agents succeeded in 2003 when the newspaper was finally forced to close down because it had refused to abide by new rules introduced through the oppressive Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) that required the newspaper and its journalists to register with the Media and Information Commission (MIC). The crackdown on press freedom in Zimbabwe saw the tightening media laws that led to the diminishing of independent press outlets.

Trouble for journalists at The Daily News started with the abduction of Mukwazhi and Nyasha Nyakunu, the then Features Editor, by war veterans invading a commercial farm. They were later released but this largely marked the beginning of troubles to face journalists at the newspaper.

Many journalists were harassed, intimidated on the streets, on their beats and all as the ruling Zanu PF party tried all it could to instil fear and send a clear message to those who wanted to continue writing and exposing government corruption and shortcomings. At The Daily News, Nyarota and many of us under him were arrested, warned and cautioned. Statements were taken while others were forced to remain in the cells for a number of days. The message was loud and clear – “do not meddle in government affairs, corruption, human rights issues and related issues that do not concern you”. Security forces selectively harassed, beat and arbitrarily

arrested those working in the independent media. Court cases were being used to wear the journalists down and send a message to those who intended to join that Big Brother was watching you all the time and anything could happen. This would inevitably lead to self-censorship as some journalists feared for their lives and their families.

The newspaper’s printing presses were even bombed, army-style, the offices petrol bombed, journalists beaten up on the streets but no-one has ever been brought to book. Journalists were being made to pay for their curiosity, for wanting to give the ordinary Zimbabwean a chance to know the truth about the political violence going on in the country, the corruption, the nepotism and related issues and policies that were bringing Zimbabwe down slowly but surely.

I remember one day when Zanu PF supporters and war veterans beat up my late colleague, Julius Zava on the streets, simply because he worked for a newspaper the government said was an enemy of the state being “used” by the British to push for regime change in the country. I also remember how on a number of times we had to leave the newsroom after receiving bomb threats – all meant to disturb the smooth production of the country’s most popular newspaper. I also remember so many times that colleagues like Urgania Mauluka came back into the newsroom with swollen faces after being attacked by war veterans and Zanu PF supporters on invaded farms.

None of the perpetrators have been brought before the courts. The impunity of crimes committed against scribes in Zimbabwe remains shocking, with the government continuing its crackdown against the opposition and independent reporting. As I write more than five international and local journalists have so far this year appeared before the courts in Zimbabwe charged with infringing the draconian AIPPA.

Press freedom remains a far cry and no-one cares for the safety of journalists who work in the small but vibrant independent media. Freedom of expression and that of our press remain severely limited by intimidation, unjust arrests, impunity for perpetrators and related issues.

Some of our former colleagues from The Daily News have lain in hospital fighting for their lives. We hail their courageous sacrifice of remaining in Zimbabwe to report the facts.. The brave men and women in the media in our country risk beatings, harassment, detention and even imprisonment for their curiosity and for wanting to share their findings with the world. I can only hope and pray that sooner or later things will change for the better in Zimbabwe, with the independent media being allowed once again to thrive and create opportunities for those coming from the colleges and universities. I miss The Daily News and hope by God that one day it will once again be allowed to grace the streets of Harare unhindered.



Repression of Media Freedom and Freedom of Expression intensifies in Zimbabwe

By Nyasha Nyakunu, *Research & Information Officer for the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA)*

The Zimbabwean government appears more determined than ever in its quest to shut out all forms of dissent, as evidenced by its unashamed attacks and assault of human rights activists and the detention of journalists covering national events as they unfold.

The evidence of the ruling Zanu PF’s intolerance to opposing views came to the fore towards the end of 2006 and in March 2007, when riot police brutally crushed planned demonstrations and political rallies leading to the hospitalisation of prominent opposition and trade union leaders.

Wellington Chibhebhe, the Secretary-General of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), was hospitalised after he was severely assaulted by the police when they cordoned off Harare’s central business district on 13 September 2006. They did this ahead of planned protests organised by the umbrella labour body to protest against the worsening economic hardships spawned by a hyper-inflationary environment.

The worst was still to come. Morgan Tsvangirai, the leader of the official opposition party, sustained serious head injuries on 11 March 2007, when he was assaulted by the police, resulting in his admission to the intensive care unit at the Avenues Clinic in Harare.

Lovemore Madhuku, the Chairman of the National Constitutional Assembly, was given similar treatment on the same day, together with other leaders of the MDC and human rights defenders. Photojournalist Tsvangirai Mukwazhi and Tendai Musiyu, a freelance television

Put simply, there are fewer and fewer media workers operating in Zimbabwe.

producer, who both carried out work for Associated Press, were detained for two nights, together with the opposition leaders, after the police cordoned off Zimbabwe Grounds in Highfield, venue of a planned national day of prayer organised under the auspices of the Save Zimbabwe Campaign.

These developments should be viewed against the three-month ban imposed by the police on 21 February 2007 against political rallies and demonstrations in Harare, in breach of universally acclaimed democratic practices

and norms.

The trampling of these fundamental rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association notwithstanding, the arrests of journalists conducting their lawful duties of gathering and disseminating information depicts a repressive environment backed by oppressive laws such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), Public Order and Security Act (POSA),

Media organisations continue to be attacked as agents of imperialism

Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) and a battery of other restrictive legislations.

This is despite the assurances given by the government to the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) acknowledging the restrictive

nature of AIPPA and POSA and promising that it would seriously consider revisiting the laws in question.

Zimbabwe also has constitutional, regional and international obligations to fulfill, as mandated under the various charters and conventions it has signed, ratified and acceded to in order to foster and secure an environment that respects freedom of expression as a fundamental human right.

Cases pertaining to the harassment, arrests, vilification and assault of journalists working for the private media declined compared to the period leading to the 2000 and 2002 parliamentary and presidential elections re-



spectively. This is partly attributable to the closure of newspapers since 2003. Put simply, there are fewer and fewer media workers operating in Zimbabwe. However the pattern of harassments and intolerance remains unchanged.

This is amply demonstrated by the continued unlawful arrest, harassment and intimidation of journalists working for the private media while conducting their professional duties.

On 31 January 2007, Bill Saidi, the Deputy Editor of the Standard, received a brown envelope containing a bullet and a threatening message warning him to "watch out". The envelope also contained a press cutting of a cartoon that was carried by the Standard in its edition of 28 January 2007 of an illustration of baboons having a hearty laugh after having picked up a payslip belonging to soldiers of the Zimbabwe National Army who are reportedly lowly paid.

Journalists Ndamu Sandu and Godwin Mangudya were arrested on 19 July 2006 and detained at Harare Central Police station without charge while covering a demonstration by residents against poor service delivery by the Harare Municipality. Sandu and Mangudya are accredited journalists as required under AIPPA, but were still arrested while conducting their professional duties of covering and reporting on events as they unfold. Sandu is employed by the privately owned weekly, The Zimbabwe Standard, while Mangudya is a journalist with the banned The Daily News.

Similarly, Mike Saburi, a freelance cameraperson was arrested, together with leaders of the ZCTU on 13 September 2006, ahead of the already-mentioned planned nationwide demonstrations to protest the worsening economic hardships while conducting his lawful duties as a journalist.

Saburi was detained for two nights at Harare Central Police Station and only released on bail on 15 September 2006 on charges of violating Section 37 (1) (b) of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act which deals with conduct likely to breach public peace. He was later removed from remand after the State withdrew charges against him.

Media organisations such as MISA-Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists and Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe continue to be attacked as agents of imperialism in a desperate attempt to stall their efforts towards the establishment of an independent, self-regulatory media council. The three organisations constitute the Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ).

These events continue to unfold despite the ACHPR's fact-finding mission to Zimbabwe in 2002 which condemned Zimbabwe's media laws. The ACHPR made yet another follow-up report at the end of its 38th Ordinary Session in Banjul, The Gambia held from November 21 - 5 December 2005, noting again that Zimbabwe's media laws violated basic freedoms.

In its December 2005 report, the Commission, among other contentious issues, called on the Zimbabwean government to:

*Respect fundamental rights and freedoms of expression, association and assembly by repealing or

amending repressive legislation, such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, the Broadcasting Services Act and Public Order and Security Act.

*Uphold the principle of separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary and to repeal or amend Constitutional Amendment No 17 and provide an environment conducive to constitutional reform based on fundamental rights.

The government continues to duck and dive on the steps it is taking to comply with the findings in question, clearly demonstrating its reluctance to initiate and implement the requisite critical constitutional and legislative reforms.

Since the closure of the privately owned Daily News and Daily News on Sunday in September 2003, followed by that of the Tribune in June 2004 and the Weekly Times in February 2005, new and potential investors have continued to shun the country's newspaper industry.

While there have been reports of interest in investing in that sector, no sensible investor would dare venture into a sector where security of tenure is not guaranteed, due to the stringent registration and accreditation provisions imposed under AIPPA and the real risk of meeting with the same fate as that of the banned newspapers.

Zimbabweans have, therefore, continued to be denied access to alternative sources of information as there are no privately-owned dailies operating in the country, save for the government-controlled dailies, The Herald and The Chronicle, which unashamedly toe the ruling Zanu PF propaganda line as a matter of course.

The only other privately-owned publications are the financial weeklies, The Financial Gazette, The Zimbabwe Standard and Zimbabwe Independent which target a special niche market, thereby limiting their circulation to about 30,000 copies, unlike The Daily News which was a mass circulation national daily.

The remaining privately-owned publications continue to operate under constant threat of civil suits from government officials as they brave the storms of the restrictive media legislative environment in their unrelent-

ing investigative exposure of corruption within the upper echelons of power and the business community.

For instance, in May 2006, the Minister of National Security, Didymus Mutasa, threatened to set the Central Intelligence Organisation on Walter Marwizi, the News Editor of the privately-owned Zimbabwe Standard. Marwizi was investigating squabbles in the ruling Zanu PF over the running of the eastern City of Mutare. The Financial Gazette has been flooded with lawsuits by Local Government Minister, Ignatius Chombo. The paper has extensively reported on his alleged corrupt activities.

Meanwhile, chances of the return of the closed newspapers as evidenced by the seemingly inconclusive legal battle by the Associated Newspapers who are the

ZIMBABWE FACTS

Population: 13 million (WHO, 2004)

Life expectancy: 37 years (men), 34 years (women) (WHO, 2004)

Capital: Harare

Major language: English (official), Shona, Sindebele

Major religions: Christianity, indigenous beliefs

Monetary unit: 1 Zimbabwe dollar = 100 cents

Main exports: Tobacco, cotton, agricultural products, gold, minerals

Average annual income: US \$340 (World Bank, 2005)

publishers of the banned Daily News notwithstanding, the entry of new players appears very dim.

This deprivation of alternative independently-owned sources of information and ideas allows dictatorship to take hold. Affairs of the government and state remain shrouded in secrecy due to failure by citizens and the media to access information held by both public and private institutions.



'They've just picked up a Zimbabwe National Army Pay Slip'.
©The Zimbabwe Standard - Used with permission

Zimbabwe: Silencing the messenger – media workers who fall out of tune

By Simeon Mwanza, *Researcher, Amnesty International, International Secretariat*

The government of Zimbabwe has relentlessly silenced its critics in the country's private media through intimidation and repressive laws. Media workers who are considered too critical of government policies have been silenced through denying individuals licenses to practise and closure of media organizations. Amnesty International remains deeply concerned that the government of Zimbabwe has failed to respect and protect freedom of expression.

In 2002 parliament passed the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, AIPPA, ostensibly to regulate media operations, but the law has been used by government to shut down two private-owned newspapers considered to be too critical by the ruling elite.

Journalists from the *Daily News* and other private owned media organizations have braved harassment, arrest, and attacks.

The practice of journalism remains a dangerous occupation

On 1 April 2007 the Zimbabwe Republic Police arrested Gift Phiri at a shopping centre in Sunningdale, a suburb in Harare. Phiri writes for the UK-based newspaper, *The Zimbabwean*. Police took him to his home and seized a computer and documents. Police reportedly demanded to know the journalist's sources in the ruling party, ZANU (PF), and within the police. Phiri was reportedly beaten while in police custody and lawyers were denied access.

Gift Phiri was charged with operating without official accreditation and publishing "falsehoods" under Sections 79(1) and 80 (1) (b) of AIPPA. Phiri was released on bail on 5 April. On his released Phiri was hospitalised.

Phiri's story is just one of the latest attacks on freedom of expression in Zimbabwe. The practice of journalism remains a dangerous occupation and many journalists have been victims during the human rights crisis in Zimbabwe that started in 2000.

No-one was ever arrested

In 2004, the government effectively closed down the *Daily News*, a vibrant private owned daily newspaper. The Media and Information Commission, MIC, established ostensibly to register media practitioners and organizations under the AIPPA, has consistently refused to register the *Daily News*, despite a court order compelling it to do so.

The *Tribune*, another privately owned newspaper suffered the same fate in 2004.

Before its closure, the *Daily News* editorial offices had been bombed in April 2000 and its printing press was bombed in January 2001. No-one was ever arrested for these crimes. The newspaper's workers were repeatedly threatened by government ministers, ruling party militia and former freedom fighters aligned to the ruling party ZANU-PF.

Journalists have braved harassment, arrest, and attacks

Journalists from the *Daily News* and other private owned media organizations have braved harassment, arrest, and attacks. Many have been forced to abandon their chosen profession, made to scrounge for a living, fled into exile and even died paupers. Those who have remained standing continue being targeted.

A former *Daily News* employee, Bill Saidi, started practicing journalism in 1957 when he joined the *African Daily News* in the then Southern Rhodesia. He had a stormy relationship with the state from the colonial days as well as with the post-colonial state.

Saidi was 65 when the *Daily News* was shut down and was considering retirement. He is currently employed by the *Zimbabwe Standard*. However, not many were able to keep practicing the profession of their choice.

Saidi received death threats including having an envelope containing a bullet sent to his office on 31 January 2007. There was also a warning note in the envelope. Other contents of the envelope included a newspaper cutting from the *Zimbabwe Standard's* sister paper, the *Zimbabwe Independent*, which was critical of the army and the Central Intelligence Organization.

Saidi sees the curtailment of freedom of expression in Zimbabwe as a betrayal of the liberation struggle throughout which he supported the nationalists fighting for independence from colonial rule. Just as in colonial times, those targeted now are people perceived to be critical of government policies, including those reporting on human rights violations.

In April 2001, the Broadcasting Services Act became law establishing the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe, BAZ, ostensibly established to issue licenses to radio and television stations. To date no license has been issued. The only private owned television station, JOY TV, was shut down in May 2002.

Offices bombed and workers arrested

Radio Voice of the People, Radio VOP, a private radio station that maintains an office in Harare but broadcasts from abroad had its offices bombed in August 2002. Radio VOP director John Masuku and other workers were arrested in December 2005 and spent four nights in police custody. Trustees of the organization were also arrested. They were charged with broadcasting without a license. The matter dragged on for ten months and was later dismissed by the magistrate court. Despite having applied for a license with the BAZ the Radio VOP remains unlicensed and cannot broadcast in Zimbabwe.



Simeon Mwanza

Media practitioners have complained that the Broadcasting Services Act is too restrictive and does not allow foreign funding. Masuku says "with the situation prevailing in the country where foreign currency is scarce, it would be very difficult to operate without a foreign partnership." He also accuses the BAZ of being biased against government critics.

The only privately owned television station, JOY TV, was shut down in May 2002.

Amnesty International called on the Zimbabwean government to respect and protect freedom of expression

Amnesty International has witnessed the continuous shrinking of press freedom in Zimbabwe. The organization has repeatedly called on the government of Zimbabwe to respect and protect freedom of expression which is a right guaranteed in Section 20 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe and contained in Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Zimbabwe is a state party.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S CONCERNS IN ZIMBABWE

Sustained and terrifying assault on human rights

When Zimbabwe commemorated 27 years of independence on 18 April 2007, many of its citizens were either in police custody, nursing injuries inflicted by the police and other state security agents, or living in fear for daring to exercise their right to peaceful protest. Many have gone into hiding; many are spending sleepless nights afraid of being abducted or of being subjected to torture, simply for choosing to belong to an opposition political party.

On 11 March 2007 the world witnessed systematic violations of human rights targeted at government critics in Zimbabwe. In total, about 50 activists were arrested for exercising their right to peaceful association and assembly. These are rights guaranteed in Section 21 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe; Articles 10 and 11 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and Articles 21 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Amnesty International has been deeply concerned that the police denied access to lawyers and medical care to the severely injured activists it was holding in custody.

A range of economic and social rights have been undermined by the actions of the Zimbabwe government, particularly the rights to housing and food. The breakdown in the rule of law and the way in which Zimbabwe's 'Fast Track' land reform program was imple-

mented, combined with periods of drought and the impacts of HIV/AIDS, have resulted in serious food shortages.

No justice for the victims of the government's destruction of people's homes

Since 2000, the people of Africa and of the world over have witnessed an increasing erosion of human rights in Zimbabwe. In May 2005 the government embarked on Operation Murambatsvina; a programme of mass forced evictions and demolition of homes and informal businesses. In a report released on 22 July 2005 the UN estimated that some 700,000 people had lost their homes, their livelihoods, or both, between May and July 2005 and that at least 2 million more people were indirectly affected by the operation. The loss of homes, property, and livelihoods that accompanied Operation Murambatsvina has also reduced income for already very poor families. A year later, only just over 3000 homes had been built or partly built to replace the 90,000 homes that had been destroyed.

People whose homes have been demolished have been told to return to the rural areas or face further action from the Zimbabwe Republic Police and the dreaded Central Intelligence Organisation. While some have been able to do this, many others have been forced to stay on the streets during some of the coldest nights of the Zimbabwean year.

Education Minister Aeneas Chigwedere claimed that there is "nobody in Zimbabwe who does not have a rural home". The Mugabe government claims that the clearances were needed in order to carry out "a vigorous clean-up campaign to restore sanity".

Denial of human rights and the link with poverty

Amnesty International's research has found that in Zimbabwe human rights violations are driving people deeper into poverty. This poverty has directly resulted in further human rights violations as people cannot afford adequate housing, food, fees for education for their children, or health care. The government has not put in place any provisions to assist with access to housing, education and health care. Only a tiny minority of people in need of anti-retroviral drugs actually receives them and the mass forced evictions in 2005 disrupted many HIV/AIDS programmes. The government also severely restricted the capacity of non-governmental organisations to provide effective services in rural areas. Humanitarian programmes for food relief are often politicised which means that members of the ruling party get food, and members of the opposition parties may not.

The toll of impunity

Amnesty International defines impunity as the failure to

bring to justice those who commit serious violations of human rights. The absence of justice and redress prolongs and intensifies the pain felt by the relatives of those who are killed or who 'disappear'.

Amnesty International is concerned about impunity in Zimbabwe at two levels: within the country where individual perpetrators of violations act with impunity; at the international level impunity for the Zimbabwe government is facilitated by the silence of African political leaders and their shielding of Zimbabwe from criticism at international forums such as the UN and AU.

Impunity has been facilitated by politicisation of the police force and undermining the independence of the judiciary. Amnesty International has documented numerous cases of human rights abuses in Zimbabwe in which no attempt has been made to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Is the African Union being tough enough on the Zimbabwean government?

Amnesty International is deeply concerned that leaders of the African Union have allowed Zimbabwe to operate outside the African Union and United Nations human rights frameworks. They have allowed a culture of impunity to thrive in Zimbabwe with arrests, abductions, detention, and torture now becoming a regular occurrence. Amnesty would like to see African leaders doubling their efforts to bring to an end the suffering in Zimbabwe.

ZIMBABWE GROUP AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IRISH SECTION

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Contact: zimbabwegroup@amnesty.ie or contact the Amnesty Office in Dublin on: (01) 6776361

Visit www.amnesty.ie to learn more about the Zimbabwe group's work and to take action for human rights.

UNESCO World Press Freedom Day conference (3rd – 4th May) Medellin, Colombia on "Press Freedom, Safety of Journalists and Impunity". This is a date on which to celebrate the fundamental principles of press freedom; to evaluate press freedom around the world, to defend the media from attacks on their independence and to pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives in the exercise of their profession.

Amnesty International Irish Section Zimbabwe Group

- Campaigns against human rights abuses in Zimbabwe
- It offers solidarity to human rights defenders in Zimbabwe.
- It raises awareness in Ireland of the deteriorating human crisis in Zimbabwe.
- It urges the Irish government to seek every way possible to assist in bringing about change in Zimbabwe
- It urges the African Union to play a stronger role in pressurising the Zimbabwean government to respect human rights

The Zimbabwe Group is supported by Amnesty International Groups around Ireland, by groups in colleges and universities, and by groups in schools. It works alongside many other Amnesty International national sections on joint campaigns such as urging the Zimbabwean police to honour their code of conduct and respect the human rights of all people.

The Amnesty International Irish Section Zimbabwe Group wishes to thank all those who took time to contribute to this commemorative Daily News edition. We salute your courage and that of your colleagues in Zimbabwe. We join with you in wishing for a brighter future for Zimbabwe as a just and peaceful society based on respect for the human rights of all its citizens.

Journalists who have contributed to this issue were invited to express their own views, which do not necessarily represent the views of Amnesty International.