Webcasters, diffusion service providers caught in BAZ loop

By Dumisani Ndlela

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The Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) has urged diffusion and webcasting service providers to register their operations this year, saying it had the backing of the law to demand fees and licence their operations.

The demand comes even as the authority continued to ignore public calls for the registration of independent broadcasting services in the country despite a clear political commitment between principals to the country's fractious inclusive government to free the air waves and register private players under a political agreement brokered by former South African President Thabo Mbeki in 2008.

Reforming the media landscape

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) had ordered Zimbabwe's inclusive government to implement a number of measures aimed at reforming the media landscape within 30 days from its August meeting in Namibia.

Former opposition party representatives in the government charge that the former ruling ZANU PF party leadership has stalled progress in media reform.

Part of the measures agreed by the SADC included the restructuring of the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ).The appointment of the current BAZ board in October 2009 has been disputed.

In a public notice circulated at the start of this year, BAZ said Zimbabwean law defined broadcasting services as "any service which delivers television or radio programmes to persons having equipment appropriate for receiving that service".

Such services, it said, comprised programmes for reception by members of the public and transmitted by broadcasting or telecommunication system.

BAZ said it was demanding applications for all classes of broadcasting services it said were referred to by the law, stating these were not subject to a public enquiry.

Various industries affected

This has put within its loop banks, hotels and lodges, hospitals, nursing homes and other business operators with diffusion services within their premises.

The notice also said those broadcasting pre-recorded programmes for reception by passengers of any railway service, transport operators or luxury buses were compelled to register with BAZ.

The fees range from US$3000 for transport operators to US$9000 for programme providers annually.

Webcasters, whom BAZ said were offered computer-mediated broadcasting services, had to pay a US$1000 non-refundable application fee and a basic fee of US$18000 apiece for content providers and webcasting servicer facility.

"The authority wishes to advise members of the public that the authority will be receiving these applications throughout the year 2011," said BAZ, warning that it was an offence for any person to provide any service falling under the definition of broadcasting or to operate a signal carrier for purposes of transmitting broadcasting services without a certificate issued by BAZ.

ABOUT DUMISANI NDLELA

Dumisani Ndlela is a Zimbabwean journalist specialising in business and financial reporting, with experience reporting on commodities, stock and financial markets, advertising, marketing and the media. He has previously reported from a number of regional countries as well as from the UK and Germany on commodities and regional integration. He can be contacted on dndlela@yahoo.co.uk.

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