

Zim: Gov't must fulfil media freedom obligations

HARARE: MISA-Zimbabwe held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Harare on 15 August 2009 during which its chairperson, Loughty Dube, urged the inclusive government to fulfil its obligations as required in terms of regional and international instruments that protect media freedom and freedom of expression.

Addressing delegates to the AGM Dube said: "We also take this opportunity to remind the inclusive government of its obligations in terms of the regional and international instruments, declarations, charters or conventions that Zimbabwe has willingly signed or ratified.

"Only, and only then, will we hail Zimbabwe as being genuinely on the path towards creating an environment that allows for the proliferation of media diversity, pluralism and independence as well as a citizenry that increasingly enjoys unfettered access to information that allows them to make informed decisions on issues that affect their daily lives."

He re-affirmed MISA-Zimbabwe commitment to media self-regulation as expressed through the establishment of the existing Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe as opposed to the envisaged statutory Zimbabwe Media Commission.

"MISA-Zimbabwe remains hopeful that the constitution-making process currently underway will see the inclusion of a constitutional provision that explicitly guarantees media freedom underpinned by media self-regulation in line with the Banjul Declaration on the Principles of Freedom of Expression in Africa," said Dube.

While cases of media violations relatively declined with the advent of the inclusive government, MISA-Zimbabwe, however, remains concerned with the sporadic nature of cases of harassment and arrests of journalists. Cases include those of freelance photojournalist Andriison Manyere and the criminal defamation case of Brezhnev Malaba, the editor of *The Chronicle* and his reporter Nduduzo Tshuma; Vincent Kahiya and Constantine Chimakure of the *Zimbabwe Independent* and Davison Maruziva, the editor of *The Standard*. Malaba is now the editor of *The Sunday Mail* which is published by the state-controlled Zimpapers Group which also publishes *The Chronicle*.

"This untenable and restrictive media environment is spawned by existing repressive legislation such as Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), Broadcasting Services Act (BSA), Criminal Law Codification and Reform Act and Interception of Communications Act.

"As MISA-Zimbabwe we therefore reiterate our clarion call for the repealing of these repressive laws. We therefore remain committed to playing a meaningful role towards that eventuality as guided by our mission and vision," said Dube.

Delegates to the AGM also adopted and effected amendments to MISA-Zimbabwe's constitution in line with a 2008 Regional Governing Council (RGC) AGM resolution. The RGC tasked all regional MISA Chapters to incorporate the amendments into

their respective 2009 AGMs. The 2008 Regional AGM resolved that the constitutional amendments should be incorporated into the constitutions of all regional chapters at their respective 2009 AGMs.

Thus the MISA-Zimbabwe AGM in compliance with the RGC resolution endorsed that the previous 30% gender quota be moved up to 50% to be in line with the regional gender representation. The implication of this resolution is that all Chapters and all bodies and structures such as the NGC, RGC, EC, TFB, office staff will be guided by the 50-50 representation.

The constitution was also amended to increase the term of the National Governing Council (NGC) from two years to three years. The most important implication of this resolution is all Chapter constitutions should now reflect this. The other implication is that the current NGC and RGC members will stay on until the 2011 elections.

The AGM also approved the resolution that all appointments for the position of national director will involve and include the regional director. The implication of this resolution is that the whole process of advertising, short listing and interviewing for the position will involve the regional director.

Meanwhile, the highlight of the AGM during which the national director and national treasurer presented their annual and financial reports respectively, was the introduction of the Best Advocacy Committee of the Year Award. Kwekwe Advocacy Committee won the best prize followed by that of Chinhoyi and Harare respectively.

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