

# Tsvangirai launches Public Broadcasting Report

HARARE: Africa Governance Monitoring and Advocacy Project (AFRIMAP), Open Society Initiative Southern Africa (OSISA), Open Society Institute Media Programme (OSIMP), in conjunction with MISA-Zimbabwe launched a report based on a survey entitled “Public Broadcasting In Africa Series” on 18 November 2009 at Crowne Plaza Hotel in Harare.

The report was officially launched by the prime minister of Zimbabwe, Morgan Tsvangirai.

Addressing delegates from the diplomatic community, media fraternity, government, members of parliament, civil society and media stakeholders, the PM impressed on the need for the media industry to regulate itself as opposed to statutory regulation.

“I am a strong proponent of the view that due to its very power, and the inalienable right of freedom of information and freedom of expression, the state should play no role in its regulation. Instead, the media, like so many other professions, should operate largely on the basis of self-regulation,” said Tsvangirai.

Tsvangirai's position on the state of the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holding (ZBH) resonates with MISA-Zimbabwe's position that there is an imperative need to transform ZBH from a state broadcaster into a genuine public broadcaster.

“... let me say that I'm in favour of moves to transform our state broadcaster into a truly public broadcaster,” he insisted.

Tsvangirai called for editorial independence within the media, as a situation which would lead to the audience and the public at large making informed decisions on a day-to-day basis.

“I look forward for a day when the coverage of events attended by political leaders is decided by editors who have only one consideration - what is in the best interest of their reading and viewing public,” Tsvangirai said.

The message by the PM was echoed by MISA-Zimbabwe's national vice chairperson, Njabulo Ncube when he introduced the guest of honour. The vice chairperson applauded the launch of the report as timely and critical given the stagnancy which defines the broadcasting industry in Zimbabwe.

“In the last ten years, there has been little to no change in the regulation of the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings, which has functioned more as a state broadcaster than a public one. Neither has there been any granting of television nor radio broadcasting licenses to interested media players. Instead, the general tendency has been that previous governments have promised to free the airwaves only in word, but not in deed,” said Ncube.

He however, pointed out that the formation of the coalition government presented opportunities for policy reforms which are

critical in the realisation of the right to freedom of expression and the media.

“We must however qualify our optimism with caution. This is because we are worried that Article 19 of the Global Political Agreement recognises laws that have been used to repress the media in Zimbabwe, namely, the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA). And it is our fervent hope that in the current round of negotiations between the three political parties, this particular concern be recognized, in tandem with the fact that there are no new newspapers in the country,” argued Ncube.

The meeting was chaired by MISA-Zimbabwe board member Faith Zaba, with a panel of discussants consisting of Ozias Tungwarara, director of AFRIMAP, Chris Mhike, a lawyer and nominee to the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) and Andrew Chigovera, formerly with the Attorney General's office.

In his opening remarks, Tungwarara said that the survey was aimed at citizen participation in decision-making, based on research findings carried out in a framework guided by international and regional standards. Chigovera argued that the survey was a positive step towards media freedom as a reference point for the media stakeholders and further research in the field of broadcasting. He further argued that the research was compiled in accordance with international and regional treaties such as African Charter on Broadcasting (ACB), African Charter on Human Rights and People's Rights (ACHPR) among others.

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