

Zim: Paying for a jingle

Zimbabweans who do not have satellite dishes and decoders for alternative broadcast are stuck with what has become a regular feature of domestic television and radio programming: a jingle reminding them that President Robert Mugabe is still ruling.

By [Dumisani Ndlela](#) 19 Jul 2010

The jingle, touting Mugabe and his two deputies as "the winning team" and suggesting that Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and his Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party are the "losers", is being played every 30 minutes on both radio and television.

Infuriating the public

That's enough to infuriate viewers and listeners. According to newspaper reports, Tsvangirai and his counterparts in another MDC formation headed by Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara are already furious.

But the state-owned broadcaster is rubbing salt to a fresh wound; with the regular jingles are adverts, also being played every 30 minutes, counselling viewers and listeners to buy radio and television licenses or face the wrath of the law.

"(We) give you the best programming on all stationsBuy your licence and satisfy your viewing and listening pleasure," says part of the advert, normally coming soon after the jingle.

Gearing for elections

Analysts and commentators say the state-owned broadcaster is already gearing for elections and might be battling to raise cash to bankroll a campaign by Mugabe's ZANU-PF party.

The broadcaster's inspectors have become a common feature in shopping centres in the capital where they are issuing drivers with unlicensed radios tickets or forcing them to buy the licences to avoid jail.

Door-to-door visits

They are also making door-to-door visits in mainly high density suburbs asking residents to produce licences for their radios and televisions and issuing tickets to those unable to buy licences.

Sources indicated that the ZBC could potentially mobilise upward of US\$100 million from its current clampdown.

The lowest license, costs US\$20, with a vehicle radio license pegged at US\$80 and the highest licence for corporate licence at US\$100.

The catchment for the station is estimated at five million, including areas without radio and television signal but are still compelled to hold licences.

Pay a fine, and buy a licence

"The bad thing is even if you have a radio or television that is not working they force you to have a licence,' said a dejected resident from a Harare suburb who was given a ticket on Friday, 16 July 2010.

The ticket compels anyone suspected of "having one or more receivers" to produce a valid listener's licence to a police station or to pay a fine and buy a licence.

"If you do not do so, you will be prosecuted for possessing a receiver without holding a listener's licence," reads part of the ticket.

Deserted by advertisers and readers

A former ZBC board chairman, Justin Mutasa, once made a rare admission that the broadcaster's poor programming has crippled operations.

"We have been deserted by advertisers and readers," Mutasa told a meeting of ZBC TV staffers.

Apparently, ZBC was privatised over five years ago. President Mugabe's nephew, Leo Mugabe, had charged then that ZBC should not demand radio and TV licence fees from the public because the broadcaster was now registered under the Companies Act as a private limited company.

Leo Mugabe alleged that collection of the compulsory viewers and listener licence fees from the public could be legally challenged.

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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