

MISA Zim mobilises public for broadcasting reforms

The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Zimbabwe is mobilising public support for its campaign for the liberalisation of the country's airwaves, which still remain under the grip of the state-owned Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings (ZBH).

By [Dumisani Ndlela](#) 6 Oct 2010

The MISA Zimbabwe "Free the airwaves now" campaign is urging the public to join the demand for public, commercial and community broadcasting in the country.

"It's part and parcel of efforts to influence and put pressure on reformation of broadcasting. While some steps have been taken to diversify media, little has been done to liberalise the airwaves," said Nhlanhla Ngwenya, country director for MISA Zimbabwe.

Petitioning government

He said MISA's effort to canvass public support for the campaign was meant to "debunk" the myth in government which had "parried off our demands as elitist and influenced by Western interests". The media freedom advocacy group is hoping to petition government on the issue.

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

Restructuring BAZ

Part of the measures included the restructuring of the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ). The appointment of the current BAZ board in October last year has been disputed by former opposition MDC party leader and now Prime Minister in the inclusive government, Morgan Tsvangirai and other pro-reform activists.

Tsvangirai had said the appointments by ZANU PF's Information Minister Webster Shamu were irregular.

The Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) registered four daily newspapers in May - *The Daily News*, *NewsDay*, *The Mail* and *The Daily Gazette*. *NewsDay* hit the streets during the first week of June, and *The Daily News*, which had been banned in 2004, has indicated it might start publishing this month.

Legal status of BAZ

Although the ZMC is also responsible for the registration of all media, including broadcast, it is however the responsibility of BAZ to allocate any aspiring broadcasters wavebands on which to broadcast.

Ngwenya said the reconstitution of BAZ, which has done nothing to move the process of opening up the country's broadcasting space, was key to the liberalisation of the broadcasting arena.

"The dispute over the board means the legal status of BAZ is hotly disputed hence an illegal entity cannot legitimately call for licensing of broadcasters," said Ngwenya, who maintained: "As long as BA

is under dispute it cannot license aspiring broadcasters."

Accessing satellite channels

Zimbabwe currently has two television broadcasting channels, both controlled by ZBH, as well as four radio stations all controlled by the state-managed entity.

Disillusioned viewers and listeners have been forced to resort to satellite channels, but few can access these due to costs.

Members of the public who want to support MISA's campaign can write to freetheairwaves@misazim.co.zw or to PO Box HR8113, Harare.

ABOUT DUMISANI NDLELA

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