

Zambia: MPs call for regulation of media

On 13 November 2008, the members of parliament in Zambia called for the regulation of media organisations through the use of statutory instruments as opposed to self-regulation because of the alleged biased media coverage of the just ended presidential by-election.

According to a report in the *Zambia Daily Mail* of 14 November and the live broadcast of Parliament Radio which MISA-Zambia monitored, the MPs alleged that there was a need for media organisations to be regulated by statutory instruments in order to stop journalists from publishing information that could incite violence.

Brian Ntundu, MP for Gwembe constituency in Zambia's southern province, said that some media organisations had reduced themselves to campaign managers for some parties, disregarding the ethics of journalism. Ntundu added that the coverage of campaigns by some media houses left parliamentarians doubtful.

Matero constituency MP, Faustina Sinyangwe, weighed in, saying that it was shameful for a newspaper to publish information that could incite the public into becoming violent. She called for the establishment of a body to regulate community radio stations and called for training of journalists in such media houses. MP Sinyangwe said journalists were supposed to follow ethics regardless of political party affiliation. Livingstone constituency MP, Sakwiba Sikota, who claimed to be a strong advocate of media freedom in Zambia, stated that media conduct during the pre-, and post-election period has made it difficult for him to defend press freedom anymore. Sikota expressed worry at the media's failure to self-regulate.

Information Minister, Mike Mulongoti, said that much as he valued press freedom, he can only do so if the media is responsible. He also said that it is the government's responsibility to protect citizens from harm. During the same debate, the Zambian parliament adopted a report by the Parliamentary Committee on Information and Broadcasting. The report was compiled after several organisations appeared before the committee early this year to submit reports on various media issues. MISA Zambia was one of the organizations that made a submission on community radio issues.

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