

MISA concerns over granting of radio licenses

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The independent Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Zimbabwe has said the process to award commercial licenses to two new radio stations recently was not open and fair.

The awarding of licenses was set to mark a major milestone in media reforms in Zimbabwe but MISA described it as a 'sham' as the two new stations have strong links with Robert Mugabe's ZANU PF party.

The two licenses were issued to ZiFM, controlled by AB Communications headed by broadcaster Supa Mandiwanzira, and Talk Radio channel to be run by Zimpapers, publishers of the *Herald*.

The process was overseen by Tafataona Mahoso, the BAZ chairman who is a well-known ZANU PF apologist. Several media groups said the decision to grant the licenses to ZiFM and Talk Radio channel 'cruelly' dashed any hopes for broadcasting plurality in Zimbabwe.

When BAZ invited applications, 14 organisations applied but 10 were rejected, with no reasons given. Among the final four were the two winners announced last week. Others were Kiss FM, which had music superstar Oliver Mtukudzi among its directors and Radio VOP, which broadcasts into Zimbabwe from the Netherlands.

MISA has since dispatched a letter to the three Principles in the GPA, Robert Mugabe, Morgan Tsvangirai and Arthur Mutambara, highlighting the fact that BAZ is still not procedurally constituted as required in terms of the law.

BAZ board members were unilaterally appointed by the Ministry of Media, Information and Publicity on 30th September 2009.

This was not done in consultation with other Principals in the GPA and the parliamentary Standing Rules and Orders Committee, as required by the law that governs the unity government.

The MISA letter says: "In writing this letter of appeal, MISA-Zimbabwe is greatly encouraged by the fact that His Excellency and the Right Honourable Prime Minister are on record confirming and conceding that indeed this legal procedure was not duly followed and that the matter should be revisited."

'The matter has, however remained unresolved up to the time of the issuance of the two licenses in question. It is MISA-Zimbabwe's submission this development, renders the new licenses in question invalid,' the MISA statement said.

They went on to appeal to the Principles to correct the illegality of the situation.

Source: allAfrica.com

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