

# Zimbabwe minister threatens press with jail over leaks

NEW YORK: A Zimbabwean minister who threatened to jail journalists should retract his statement and honour an agreement to implement media reform, the Committee to Protect Journalists said on Friday, 13 August 2010.

Information Minister Webster Shamu made the threat on August 4 against journalists who used information he said had been leaked from cabinet meetings.

Shamu said that journalists and ministers could face jail sentences of up to 20 years under the 1970 Official Secrets Act for using confidential information from cabinet proceedings to "further their political agendas," according to news reports. The legislation, which dates back to the Republic of Rhodesia, prohibits government employees from disclosing official information to the public that the state considers "prejudicial" to the safety or interest of Zimbabwe.

Shamu issued the threat after a cabinet meeting in which ministers traded accusations over information leaks to the press, according to local journalists. One of the latest leaks was a cabinet agreement to stop the state-run Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation from playing pro-ZANU-PF songs every half hour. Shamu was reportedly planning a new series of pro-ZANU-PF songs for the country's state-controlled TV and radio stations, according to local reports.

"Instead of implementing media reforms pledged since 2008 under the Global Political Agreement, Zimbabwe's ZANU-PF-led coalition government is reviving an outdated, repressive law to criminalise independent reporting," said CPJ Africa Advocacy coordinator Mohamed Keita. "We call on the information minister to retract his statement, and move to make media reforms a reality."

A coalition government between the former ruling ZANU-PF party and two opposition parties, MDC-M and MDC-T (the two split in 2005), was formed in January 2009 after a disputed March 2008 election in which CPJ documented a spike in journalist arrests.

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