

Charamba reads riot act to foreign correspondents

Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe's press secretary on Wednesday, 19 March 2008, summoned and read the riot act to journalists working for foreign publications over coverage of the 29 March elections.

By [Lebo Nkato](#) 25 Mar 2008

George Charamba summoned 12 journalists from Zambia's Post newspaper, China's Xianua, the South African Broadcast Corporation (SABC), Al Jazeera, Reuters and AFP for the meeting which lasted an hour.

A scribe who attended the meeting said Charamba told them that all journalists have been placed under surveillance to ensure that they do not harbour unaccredited foreign journalists.

"When we arrived, Charamba told us to put our books and pens away. He said, this was not a press conference and he wanted to talk about what he called administrative issues," the journalist said.

"He said the country's security agents were on high alert and journalists were under surveillance."

Charamba, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Publicity, also revealed that two weeks ago, journalists from a European television station, France 24, "sneaked" into the country to cover the polls but were arrested and deported.

The journalist added: "Charamba said if we entertained any foreign journalists, our accreditation would be revoked."

Last week, the state-owned Sunday Mail newspaper reported that the government is screening foreign journalists on suspicions that some may be spying for "hostile Western nations".

The paper said at least 300 foreign journalists have applied for accreditation but priority was being given to journalists from Africa and other developing nations that are sending election monitors.

The Mail reported: "There is an unprecedented request for field studios and most of the media organisations want to deploy their star anchorpersons. The CNN wants to deploy Nic Robertson, who is coming straight from Baghdad, while ITN wants to deploy the world renowned Jon Snow."

It also quoted Charamba as saying: "The deployment of think-tanks suggests that the elections will be much more than a news item, while there is a strange alliance building between traditionally rival networks for the purposes of covering the elections.

"What this suggests is a shared objective. The story from Zimbabwe has to be uniformly echoed for propaganda purposes. Commercial rivalry has been set aside."

President Mugabe has barred Western observers from the 29 March elections in which he faces the challenge of his former finance minister, Simba Makoni, and opposition leader, Morgan Tsvangirai.

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