

The Zimbabwean launches freedom of speech campaign

JOHANNESBURG: Launching a new campaign conceptualised for *The Zimbabwean* newspaper, TBWA\Hunt\Lascaris Johannesburg have erected billboards across South Africa depicting nine, harrowing real stories of life in Zimbabwe. The campaign is entitled 'Give a voice to the voiceless'.



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The campaign will provide three platforms for free speech including a [series of billboards](#) by world-renowned photojournalists showing real-life subjects of the everyday hardships experienced by Zimbabweans and an [interactive website](#) where visitors can interact directly with the stories behind each of the images, subscribe to the newspaper and share their own stories as to how their lives have been affected by the current political and economic situation in Zimbabwe.

Wilf Mbanga, the exiled editor of *The Zimbabwean* whose reporters and distributors continue to face daily intimidation say "After the events in Tunisia, Egypt and now Libya, will we see change in Zimbabwe? The people are weary yet resilient but not much has changed since the formation of the GNU two years ago and the situation remains desperate for millions of people.

Nine Zimbabweans who wanted their stories to be heard will ignite the 'Give a voice to the voiceless' campaign to protect freedom of speech, giving a voice to all Zimbabweans both in and outside the country. We hope their courage and dignity will inspire their countrymen and women to make their voices heard and also to support the many independent journalists who risk intimidation and imprisonment just to report the reality of life in Zim. Clearly, neither the people nor the media will be silenced."

The stories and situations depicted through the billboards include:

- Zimbabweans forced to flee the country and enter South Africa illegally
- Hyperinflation making ordinary, everyday necessities virtually unaffordable
- MDC supporters injured in attacks from Zimbabwean army soldiers
- Local chiefs who support MDC being marginalised
- A four-year old boy who lost his mother in the Cholera outbreak
- A man photographed at a rural hospital in the beginning of 2011, suffering from advanced TB as a secondary infection to HIV and unable to receive treatment
- Homeless children being forced to sleep on the pavements in downtown Harare
- Buhle, a Zimbabwean refugee living in South Africa and former secretary of youth for the opposition MDC party in Harare, who, after the MDC won the 2008 elections had ZANU-PF thugs burn down her house, kill her brother, rape her friend, hit her and leave her for dead. She was heavily pregnant at the time.

In an effort to connect with the Zimbabwean diaspora and to keep the plight of Zimbabwe on the world agenda, the newspaper first partnered with ad agency TBWA\Hunt\Lascaris Johannesburg in 2009 to develop the Trillion Dollar campaign. The campaign included various elements, including a billboard created wholly of Zimbabwean dollar notes which highlighted the fact that Zimbabweans were unable to receive objective news reporting and information about what was happening in their own country.

Focusing on everyday people

Damon Stapleton, executive creative director of TBWA\Hunt\Lascaris comments, "We wanted to take the next step in the campaign for the newspaper focusing on everyday people living in Zimbabwe and giving them back a voice through the newspaper which they thought that they had lost."

The Zimbabwean newspaper, originally established by journalists driven into exile, first gained global attention in 2008 when it had a 'luxury' import duty of over 55% (in addition to basic 15% VAT - total 70%) added to it by the Mugabe government thus making it unaffordable to the average Zimbabwean citizen. The paper is published twice weekly and distributed inside Zimbabwe, South Africa and the UK. The full contents are available online at www.thezimbabwean.co.uk.

Ivan Moroke, group MD of TBWA\Hunt\Lascaris concludes, "It is a great privilege for us to continue our partnership with *The Zimbabwean*. Working on a campaign with such deep cultural, political and social roots and with a client who is striving to affect change on a global and very real level for the millions of Zimbabweans across the globe."

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