

Trevor Ncube's Zim citizenship saga

Robert Mugabe's government's decision to strip Trevor Ncube - publisher of the *Standard and Zimbabwe Independent* - of his Zimbabwean citizenship signals the beginning of the end of independent media in Zimbabwe and marks the darkest period for the country's media, Zakeus Chibaya, secretary-general of Cross-border Association of Journalists (CAJ), told Bizcommunity.com.



Bylssa Sikiti da Silva 15 Jan 2007

"This is an attempt by Mugabe's regime to wipe out the last bastions of independent media in Zimbabwe," Chibaya, a Zimbabwean journalist living in exile in South Africa, said.

"This is the darkest period of our country's media history since the closure of the *Daily News*, *Daily News on Sunday*, *Tribune* and *Weekend Times*. We are heading for a disaster. It is over and finished for investigative journalism in Zimbabwe. Government should not be let off the hook to close Ncube's newspapers because he is a Zimbabwean by birth regardless of where his father came from," Chibaya said emotionally.

But state television reported that the Media Information Commission (MIC), a Mugabe-controlled regulatory body, has said that the Government will not close Ncube's newspapers even if he loses his citizenship. "I do not believe this. These guys are full of dirty tricks and silly technicalities," Chibaya remarked. "What will happen is that the MIC will ask Ncube to re-submit his newspapers' registration application.

"Then they will reject it right away, telling him that since he is no longer a citizen, he is not entitled to own those newspapers. That is where the Government will step in to either close them down or take over, thus forcing them to toe the Government's line."

Critical stance

In terms of the Access to Information Protection to Privacy Act, no foreigner is allowed to own a media house in Zimbabwe.

Chibaya's theories also support *Mail & Guardian* editor and SANEF chairperson Ferial Haffajee and SANEF convenor Raymond Louw's joint statement. "This can only mean that Mugabe wants to close down the papers or to change their critical stance by forcing on them a new ownership structure more supportive of him."

The state-controlled newspaper *The Herald* had recently quoted Zimbabwe's registrar-general Tobaiwa Mudede as saying that Ncube has lost his citizenship because he did not renounce his right to a Zambian passport in 2001. Ncube's father was born in Zambia.

However, Ncube, who also owns the fiery South African-based *Mail & Guardian*, remains defiant, saying that he will challenge the decision in the Zimbabwe High Court as soon as possible. "As far as the constitution is concerned, I am a Zimbabwean," he was quoted as saying in the *Mail & Guardian*. "The law that Robert Mugabe and Jonathan Moyo [former Information Minister, now expelled from the ruling ZANU-PF] introduced to disenfranchise people of Zambian, Malawian or Mozambican parentage is illegitimate and unconstitutional and that is the law Mudede [registrar-general] is trying to use."

Sceptical

But Chibaya is sceptical Ncube will win the case because of the current political interference in the judiciary. "This is a politically-motivated decision. He must pray that he gets a judge that is still impartial. The Zimbabwe judiciary system has dramatically deteriorated in the past few years, and we only have very few credible judges left. Most of these recently-appointed judges are Bob supporters and therefore corrupt and lack credibility," he said.

Chibaya is a former reporter of *The Mirror*, a once-independent daily publication, which was taken over by Zimbabwe's

Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), when Mugabe's cronies bought its shares in 2003. The newspaper now operates under the eagle eye of the ruling ZANU-PF.

Chibaya's organisation, CAJ, is a non-profit media organisation based in Johannesburg, comprising African journalists exiled in South Africa after fleeing persecution in their countries of origin.

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