

Court orders reinstatement of journalists suspended for not reporting positively on President Mugabe

The Labour Court has ordered the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) to reinstate immediately, without loss of salary or benefits, six journalists who were suspended in June 2008.

The six - Lawrence Maphosa (television production manager), Patrice Makova (news editor), Sibonginkosi Mlilo (executive producer, Nhau/Indaba), Monica Gavera (executive producer-national language) and reporters Brian Paradza, Robert Tapfumaneyi and Garikai Chaunza - were suspended on allegations that they were "acting in a manner inconsistent with the fulfilment of the implied conditions" of their contracts. MISA-Zimbabwe is reliably informed that the journalists were actually suspended for not reporting positively on President Robert Mugabe's campaign for the 29 March elections. Henry Muradzikwa, ZBC's chief executive officer, was fired after the same elections on similar allegations of not supporting President Mugabe.

In nullifying the suspensions, Labour Court judges Justice Gladys Mhuri and Justice Eauna Makamure ruled that the suspensions were "dubious" and "illegal."

"The ZBC had sent my clients on forced leave from 1 June to 31 July but the judge said it was illegal for the management to do that. They can now go back to work," said the journalists' lawyer, Rogers Matsikidze.

The suspensions came barely a month after the dismissal of Muradzikwa on 14 May for defying ministerial orders to deny the opposition Movement of Democratic Change (MDC) favourable coverage in the run-up to the 29 March elections. Over the same period, there were also reports that senior government officials were holding meetings with personnel in the state media in an effort to ensure that they would cover the president's party, ZANU PF, in a positive light.

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