

# ZMC pushes for creation of statutory media complaints body

The Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) has begun the process of setting up a media complaints council to regulate journalists against unethical conduct, but critics charge the law under which such a body is being created will discredit the institution.

By [Staff reporter](#) <sup>22 Feb 2011</sup>

During a recent meeting with editors, ZMC chairman Godfrey Majonga said it was imperative to kick-start the process for the creation of the council given the increasing complaints against unprofessionalism within the media fraternity.

## setting up a code of ethics

"Many stakeholders have complained about the standards of reporting by our media. They point to a lack of professionalism and sometimes a complete disregard of those ethics that should guide us as journalists," Majonga said, encouraging journalists to discuss "such issues which include the setting up of a code of ethics or standards for the sector".

The setting up of a Media Council is provided for by the discredited Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA).

The country's Supreme Court had ruled in a 2003 judgment that part of Section 80 of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act was unconstitutional but critics charge that there are still numerous provisions in AIPPA which continue to militate against media freedom in Zimbabwe.

The Supreme Court had ruled after a constitutional challenge by Lloyd Mudiwa and Geoffrey Nyarota, the founding editor of *The Daily News*, that Section 80 (1) (b) as read with section 80 (2) contravened Section 20 (1) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe. The contentious provision made it an offence for journalists to "abuse journalistic privilege" by writing "falsehoods". About 30 journalists have been arrested and charged under this provision.

## MISA calls for self-regulatory mechanism

"Our position as MISA is that we want a self-regulatory mechanism," Nhlanhla Ngwenya, director of MISA-Zimbabwe, told Bizcommunity.com. He said a media complaints council under a repressive law risked being discredited before conception.

MISA, Ngwenya said, was not against the idea of a self-regulatory body for journalists but was opposed to it being created under a draconian law that did not recognise the right to a free press.

"It (AIPPA) is a law that's undemocratic and cannot withstand a constitutional test," said Ngwenya.

Journalists had already put together the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (VMCZ), a professional media self-regulatory body set up by Zimbabwean journalists and other stakeholders in civil society to adjudicate on media complaints from concerned stakeholders such as the public, business, politicians, and government.

All independent media have subscribed to the VMCZ code of conduct that promotes truthful, accurate, fair and balanced news reporting.

Subscribers to this code are compelled to publish a note encouraging readers to register their complaints with the VMCZ if they believed a newspaper did not meet the standards set out by the code of conduct.

Although all media practitioners had been part of preliminary talks that resulted in the creation of the VMCZ, there was what one media campaigner described as "a tactical retreat" by state media journalists once VMCZ was established to discredit

as an alternative to the one proposed under AIPPA.

"We do not compel anyone to become members. Members voluntarily subject themselves to the VMCZ code of conduct," said Loughy Dude, the VMCZ programme officer responsible for advocacy and complaints.

## **Public must become aware of council**

"We have acquitted ourselves well. We have received several cases and dealt with them. What now needs to be done is for people to become aware of our existence and that they can bring their complaints against media to the council," said Dube.

Dube said the VMCZ had last year handled 18 cases and two cases have so far been brought before it by members of the public.

Takura Zhangazha, the new VMCZ director, said his organisation would cooperate with the ZMC.

"We would encourage cooperation and would also recommend that they follow up on issues of freedom of information and the press," said Zhangazha.

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