

SA newspapers face distribution veto in Zim

The distribution of South African and other international newspapers could be banned or restricted under measures meant to limit their import into Zimbabwe.

By [Dumisani Ndlela](#) 16 May 2008

This comes after what government perceives to have been a “stepping up” in the import of “hostile tabloids published from Britain and South Africa” during the run-up to the harmonised elections on March 29.

The country is now preparing for a presidential election run-off between the incumbent Robert Mugabe and opposition MD leader Morgan Tsvangirai after none of the contestants garnered enough votes to declare a winner in line with Zimbabwe's constitution.

Tsvangirai alleges he won the vote, but the Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC), the body running elections in Zimbabwe said he won 47.87% against Mugabe's 43.24%.

The other contenders, Simba Makoni and Langton Tawungana received 8.17% and 0.57% votes respectively.

Briefing state media journalists last week, Ministry of Information and Publicity permanent secretary George Charamba said hostile foreign media had run riot and accused the state broadcaster, whose chief executive was consequently fired on Tuesday, of being swayed by “dirty money”.

He also accused newsprint suppliers of curtailing “the reach of national messaging” by undersupplying the state-owned newspaper group, Zimpapers.

Warning that government would “respond in ways that are conclusive”, Charamba indicated: “Equally, government is looking at the whole regime which allows anyone to push their publication here without paying anything, or paying very little. Yet when sales are done, profits have to be turned into foreign currency, which leaves the country. Changes will be coming soon on this front. As the ministry responsible, it is our duty to protect and defend the national media space.”

South Africa's *The Saturday Star*, *The Sunday Independent* and Wednesday's edition of *The Star*, which are owned by the Independent News & Media (SA) (INMSA), as well as *The Sunday Times*, part of Johnnic Communications' media division and the *Mail & Guardian* (M&G) retail on Zimbabwe's streets and are very popular with readers.

UK newspapers stopped distributing in Zimbabwe due to the economic crisis, but there are few citizens who receive the newspapers from the UK through subscription.

However, *The Zimbabwean*, published in the UK by a Zimbabwean Wilf Mbanga, widely distributes in Zimbabwe and was at one time insulted by a government official as being “cheaper than manna from heaven”. The newspaper is donor-funded and has a clearly defined pro-opposition stance.

UK-based magazines like *New African* (used in the last five years to carry promotional material by the Zimbabwe government) and *African Business* also distribute in Zimbabwe.

ABOUT DUMISANI NDLELA

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