

Zimbabwe set to pass new law to monitor phones and internet

Zimbabwe's parliament on Tuesday began debating a law empowering authorities to monitor phones, mail and the internet to protect national security, a move seen by critics as part of an official crackdown on the opposition.

By [MacDonald Dzirutwe](#) 13 Jun 2007

Harare - While rights groups are concerned President Robert Mugabe's government will use the Intercept of Communications Bill to infringe on privacy and further trample freedom of speech, officials have described it as integral to fighting crime.

'We are all subject to this law ... and Zimbabwe needs to mitigate against those who use technology to commit crime as is the norm globally,' Transport and Communication Minister Chris Mushowe told parliament. He noted that the United States, Britain and South Africa had similar legislation.

The Bill is expected to be passed by the lower house of parliament on Wednesday and then go on to the upper chamber.

Mugabe's government, which has ruled since independence from Britain in 1980, has a two-thirds majority both houses.

If passed, the Bill will give the state the authority to monitor the phones and mail of anyone suspected of threatening national security or involvement in criminal activities.

Fears government will abuse the law

Critics say the bill is motivated by Mugabe's desire to punish and keep closer tabs on the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), Zimbabwe's main opposition party, amid rising unrest in the economically strapped southern African nation. Opposition legislators said they fear the government will abuse the law.

'This law is about the interception of fundamental rights of our citizens and this house should refuse such frivolous and "outrightly" [sic] undemocratic laws,' said Nelson Chamisa, one of only a handful of MDC legislators who participated in the debate.

'Most provisions are injurious and the law will be used as an arrow aimed against trade unions, civil society media and political parties involved in genuine political engagements,' Chamisa said.

Zimbabwe's parliament on Tuesday also approved the Suppression of Foreign and International Terrorism Bill, which the government said would enable the country to fight international terrorism and mercenary activities.

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