

Attack on Zim 263 Chat website a blatant attempt to muzzle the media

A police raid on the offices of online news site 263 Chat after one of its journalists filmed the removal of street vendors in Harare, is a blatant assault on the right to freedom of expression and media freedom, Amnesty International said yesterday.



Image source: Gallo/Getty.

Police fired tear gas into the newsroom after chasing reporter Lovejoy Mtongwiza to the website's offices. The journalist had been taking photos and videos of the police forcing out street vendors in the Zimbabwe capital.

"Today's attack on the 263 Chat offices was designed to send a chilling message to journalists and show the lengths the Zimbabwean police are prepared to go to muzzle media freedom," said Muleya Mwananyanda, Amnesty International's Deputy Regional Director for Southern Africa.

"The authorities must end the attack on the media and launch a prompt, thorough and effective investigation into this attack and ensure that all suspected perpetrators are identified and brought to justice."

263 Chat is an online news site which reports on political, economic and social issues in Zimbabwe.

Reporter Lovejoy Mtongwiza was deployed to the city centre to take pictures of a Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and Harare City Council operation to remove street vendors.

When a group of police and council officers pursued Mtongwiza, he ran away to his employer's office. The police followed him and fired tear gas into the 263 Chat newsroom, where 14 other journalists were working. Officers also seized a mobile phone from one of the reporters.

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