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**SECOND REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION,  
MEDIA AND BROADCASTING SERVICES ON THE STATE OF THE MEDIA IN  
ZIMBABWE**

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**THIRD SESSION - NINTH PARLIAMENT**

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*Presented to Parliament in March 2022*

**S. C. 40, 2021**

### **ORDERED IN TERMS OF STANDING ORDER No. 17:**

- i.** At the commencement of every session, there shall be as many Committees to be designated according to government portfolios as the Standing Rules and Orders Committee may deem fit.
- ii.** It shall be the function of such committees to examine expenditure administration and policy of government departments and other matters falling under their jurisdictions as Parliament may, by resolution determine.
- iii.** The members of such committees shall be appointed by the Standing Rules and Orders Committee, from one or both Houses of Parliament, and such appointments shall take into account the expressed interests or expertise of the Members and Senators and the political and gender composition of Parliament.
- iv.** Each select committee shall be known by the portfolio determined for it by the Standing Rules and Orders Committee.

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE OF PORTFOLIO COMMITTEES S.O 20**

Subject to these Standing Orders a Portfolio Committee shall:

- i.** Consider and deal with all Bills and Statutory Instruments or other matters which are referred to it by or under a resolution of the House or by the Speaker;
- ii.** Consider or deal with an appropriation or money bill or any aspect of an appropriation or money bill referred to it by these Standing Orders or by or under resolution of this House;
- iii.** Monitor, investigate, inquire into and make recommendations relating to any aspect of the legislative programme, budget, rationalization, policy formulation or any other matter it may consider relevant of the government department falling within the category of affairs assigned to it, and may for that purpose consult and liaise with such a department;
- iv.** Consider or deal with all international treaties, conventions and agreements relevant to it, which are from time to time negotiated, entered into or agreed upon.

On Tuesday, 27 October, 2020, the Speaker announced that the Committee on Standing Rules and Orders had nominated the following Members to serve on the Portfolio Committee on Information, Media and Broadcasting Services: -

Hon. Bhudha -Masara S; Hon. Chikwinya S; Hon. Hamauswa S; Hon. Mamombe J; Hon. Masiya D.; Hon. Mpofu A.; Hon. Mudarikwa S; Hon. Ndebele A.; Hon. Nguluvhe A.; Hon. Nyabani T.; Hon. Paradza K.; Hon. Shamu W.K.; Hon. Tsunga R.

**Hon. Mokone S to be Chairperson**

## **1.0 Introduction**

1.1. The Corona virus pandemic has brought about change in the way the business world operates in terms of handling their daily affairs, engagement with its stakeholders and management of resources. The Media industry has also transformed and this has seen the need for companies to downscale their operations and adjusting from analogue broadcast to digital broadcasts as a means of minimizing exposure of staff to the virus at the workplace and operating environment. The Committee conducted an enquiry into the State of the Media so as to appreciate the operations of Media practitioners in view of the Covid 19 pandemic. To that end, this report provides highlights of the Committee's findings, observations and recommendations with respect to the State of the Media in Zimbabwe.

## **2.0 Objectives**

- 2.1 To ascertain the operations of media practitioners in view of the COVID 19 pandemic;
- 2.2 To appreciate the measures being taken by the Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services ensuring a conducive environment for media practitioners;
- 2.3 To have an understanding of the challenges being faced by media practitioners; and
- 2.4 To come up with recommendation for an improved environment for Media practitioners.

## **3.0 Methodology**

3.1 The Committee held oral evidence sessions on the State of the Media with the following institutions:

- i. Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services;
- ii. Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ);
- iii. National Association of Freelance Journalist (NAFJ);
- iv. Zimpapers;
- v. Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation;
- vi. Advertising Media Association; and
- vii. MISA Zimbabwe.

3.2 The Committee also conducted verification visits to Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation at Pockets Hill and Montrose in Harare and Bulawayo respectively, Zimpapers, Diamond Fm, Manica Post in Mutare, Hevoi Fm in Masvingo and Breeze Fm in Victoria Falls.

## **4.0 Committee Findings**

### **4.1 Policies and Legislation Governing the operating environment for Media Practitioners in Zimbabwe**

4.1.1 The Permanent Secretary highlighted that the Ministry superintends pieces of legislation governing the operations of Media practitioners namely: Freedom of Information Act, 2020; Zimbabwe Media Commission Act (2021); Broadcasting Services Act [Chapter 12:06] Act No. 4 of 2001); Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (Commercialization) Act, 2001 (Act No. 26 of 2001); and Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (Debt Assumption) Act, 2004 (Act No. 11 of 2004). These Acts protect the rights to the freedom of expression and the freedom of the media granted under section 61 of the Constitution.

### **4.2 ZBC Pockets Hill and Montrose**

#### **4.2.1 An overview and operation of the ZBC**

4.2.1.1 The Committee gathered that the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation is a state-controlled broadcaster in Zimbabwe which was established in terms of Section 3 of the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (Commercialisation) Act, 2001. ZBC is responsible for bringing news, entertainment, education and information to people in Zimbabwe and beyond. The Committee was informed that the ZBC operates six radio stations and one television station, providing a mix of news, current affairs, educational programming and music, in English, Shona and Ndebele, with National FM covering all the 16 languages stated in the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

#### **4.2.2 Staff Compliment**

4.2.2.1 The CEO highlighted that ZBC has a staff compliment of 734 employees countrywide, stationed at Pockets Hill, Mbare, Montrose and Gweru. In addition to the main site locations, the Committee gathered that ZBC has news gathering and licensing offices that were located in major towns in Zimbabwe's ten provinces. The Corporation informed the Committee that of the 734 employees, 650 were on a permanent contract, with the remainder on part-time contracts.

#### **4.2.3 State of equipment**

4.2.3.1 During the tour of ZBC Pockets Hill and Montrose studios, the Committee noted that ZBC had two High-definition studios and two makeshift studios, although other television studios did not have equipment and were not functional. The head of

engineering highlighted that there were outside broadcast systems that were currently being used for outside broadcasting operations. However, the main broadcast van and uplink systems were more than 10 years old and critical systems were not operating normally. The Committee gathered that ZBC had electronic news gathering and electronic field productions equipment which required Ultra High-Definition cameras, more lighting systems and microphones. The Corporation highlighted that the radio studios and radio master control system required total upgrade to get rid of ageing equipment. The Committee was apprised that the Corporation was upgrading systems using a piece-meal approach due to financial constraints and it was also digitalizing most of the critical systems with modern, automated systems to improve performance.

#### **4.2.4 Financing of ZBC**

4.2.4.1 The Corporation submitted to the Committee that they received a grant from the fiscus and they also get indirect public revenue through license fees payments. The Committee was informed that to date the Corporation had generated ZWL\$325.9 million through licensing and advertising with licensing contributing 43% whilst advertising contributed 57% of the total revenue. Further, it was highlighted that a grant of ZWL\$33 million was released from the treasury in June and another ZWL\$10 million was provided in July. Despite the steady improvement in revenues, the Corporation had recorded a cumulative loss of ZWL\$6,9 million for the period up to June 2021. The generated revenue was inadequate to cover the operational expenditure indicating the partial funding gap from operations outside the legacy debts. The CEO informed the Committee that they successfully engaged respective stakeholders on payment plans and barter deal arrangements which the Corporation aims to adhere to without compromise to reduce pressure from legacy creditors namely Telone, Liquid Telecomms, Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ), Transmedia, NSSA and others.

#### **4.2.5 Adaptation to COVID 19 Pandemic**

4.2.5.1 In an oral evidence session held with the ZBC management, it was highlighted that the Covid 19 pandemic had negatively impacted on their operations as they lost some of the dedicated journalists and at one time 30 employees tested positive to the Covid 19. However, to promote a safe environment for its staff during the Covid19 period, preventive measures were taken to ensure that minimal cases were recorded. These included decongestion of the workplace by fifty percent, suspension of late night news

bulletins, limitation of live studio interviews opting for digital information through Zoom and Skype interviews, and pre-recorded interviews as well as telephone interviews. Further, the Committee was informed that for ease of doing business, ZBC launched an online payment platform for its radio and television licenses which eases the discomfort people might feel when going outside their homes.

4.2.5.2 During the visit, the broadcaster highlighted that they had facilitated Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) and Rapid Covid-19 testing for all its staff and the Management revealed that fifty percent of its employees had been vaccinated. ZBC supplied hand sanitizer, branded masks to all its staff and wearing of masks and temperature checks for every staff and visitors at ZBC facilities was made a policy which was enforced by security officers. The Management at ZBC reassured the Committee that its Covid-19 protocol measures had so far proven to be robust and effective as fewer infection cases and only 1 casualty was recorded at its facilities, and that it will continue to prioritize the safety of its employees and visitors.

### **4.3 Challenges being faced at ZBC**

4.3.1 The Committee was informed that ZBC had depleted vehicle fleet which no longer provided adequate cover for its operations. Presently Pockets Hill had 1 Staff bus and 12 vehicles which were meant to provide transportation services to staff to work and also for media coverage. The CEO highlighted that there was no staff bus at Montrose studios and there were 25 vehicles operating, but these were not in good condition. The transport situation at ZBC affected news coverage hence affecting the fulfillment of their mandate. In total, ZBC studios required 60 new vehicles to augment its coverage and transportation services.

4.3.2 The Corporation submitted that they had poor remuneration and service packages for its staff such as medical aid, funeral and pension policies in place, which had exposed the broadcaster to competitors who attract its experienced workforce. The Committee heard that ZBC did not have a pension policy in place and that it had been suspended many years ago. The new Board at ZBC had however, revived its medical aid policy by reengaging PSMAS to provide cover for ZBC employees to the tune of ZWL\$3,5 million for medical care.

4.3.3 The Committee was informed that ZBC was riddled with debts amounting to over ZWL\$200 million dating back as far back as 2005. In this context it owed parastatals

such as ZESA, ZIMRA, Largadere sports among others. ZESA had resorted to switching off power on Mondays at Montrose Studios, whilst ZIMRA was garnishing ZBC's revenue streams.

4.3.4 It was highlighted that delays in payment of royalties to local content producers during the lockdown period had affected ZBC TV programming. In this context, production costs increased for local producers who now expected ZBC to pay upfront for their content. However, due to funding constraints ZTV programming material ended up being repeated as new content producers held on to their production.

## **4.4 ZIMPAPERS**

### **4.4.1 An overview and operations of ZimPapers**

4.4.1.1 The Committee toured Zimpapers Offices and ZTN Studios in Harare, and then visited Manica Post and Diamond FM in Mutare. Zimpapers is the biggest state-controlled Zimbabwean mass media company whose operations originally started off as a newspaper publishing company called Zimbabwe Newspapers Limited. It later diversified its operations to include commercial printing, radio and television programming. The company's portfolio includes over a dozen magazines and newspapers which include, The Herald, The Chronicle, Kwayedza H-Metro, B-Metro, The Sunday Mail, The Manica Post and several radio stations such as Star Fm and Capitalk 100.4 FM in Harare, Diamond FM in Mutare, Nyami Nyami FM in Kariba, and a television network Zimbabwe Television Network (ZTN). ZTN was now more involved in the screening of local soccer matches, talk shows and debates which were broadcasted digitally.

### **4.4.2 Staff Compliment**

4.4.2.1 The CEO highlighted that Zimpapers has a staff compliment of 1 300 employees countrywide. The Committee was informed that of the 1 300 employees, 807 employees were on a permanent contract whilst 493 were on part-time contracts.

### **4.4.3 State of equipment**

4.4.3.1 The CEO highlighted that under the radio and broadcasting division' the institution had transmission and production studios, a master control room, outside broadcast and news booths. It was highlighted that the axia mixer, engine and telephone hybrids used in the studios needed upgrading. The Committee was informed that under the Zimpapers television network (ZTN), there were production studios with functional four-camera

production studio in place, currently using one standard broadcast camera and awaiting delivery of the three outstanding. Additionally, he highlighted that ZTN has a master control room, playout and transmission and an electronic field productions & outside broadcast production.

#### **4.4.4 Financing of Zimpapers**

4.4.4.1 The Committee was informed that Zimbabwe Newspapers (1980) Limited was listed on the Zimbabwe Stock Exchange (ZSE) and release of financial information was guided by the listing rules. The Management at Zimpapers revealed that whilst 82 percent of its revenue comes from print publishing, going digital was the only way to go as people now favor the digital platform in terms of convenience and accessibility. Further, Zimpapers undertook reform processes and a new press printing facility was set up in Bulawayo where progress was reported to be 90 percent complete. This initiative was done to supplement printing of The Chronicles and to improve speed of delivery of the printed materials in the Matabeleland Province.

#### **4.4.5 Adaptation to COVID 19 Pandemic**

4.4.5.1 During the tour, the Management of Zimpapers stated that it had scaled down its hands on workers to 40 percent and 60 % were making online submissions of news articles and digital content. The Management at Zimpapers indicated that social welfare for staff was a priority and that workers had received the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> cheque in December 2020 and April 2021 respectively. An ongoing process of fumigation was professionally done and all staff were provided with Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) which were supplied by Nyaradzo Funeral Services for all Zimpapers employees. Social distancing was being implemented and transport was being provided for employees to and from work. Additionally, it was highlighted that 51 percent of Zimpapers staff had been vaccinated.

4.4.5.2 As a major publishing company, Zimpapers has been pushing corona virus awareness campaigns through its newspapers, radio, television programming and through digital online platform. The Committee was informed that Zimpapers was still to receive Covid-19 relief stimulus package from Government. The Government, however had been bringing business through corona virus adverts that it sent through Zimpapers media platforms.

### **4.5 Diamond FM and Manica Post**

#### **4.5.1 An overview of the Diamond FM and Manica Post**

4.5.1.1 The Committee was informed that Diamond FM and Manica Post were housed in the same building and usually shared staff who worked in radio and print media departments, and both were owned by Zimpapers. It was submitted to the Committee that Diamond FM is one of Zimpapers' regional commercial radio stations which was launched in 2016 at Manica Post offices in Mutare. The Chief Executive Officer, informed the Committee that the launch of the radio station was in line with the company's five-year plan to extend its dominance as a content factory. Radio coverage for the station services an 80km radius from Mutare urban and extends as far as Buhera, Makoni, Chipinge, Nyanga, Chimanimani, parts of Honde and also Mozambique using the other transmission sites.

4.5.2 The Committee was informed that revenue for the station was mostly from airtime, live broadcasts, roadshows and radio adverts. Broadcasts were conveyed in English, Tindwi, Manyika and Ndau with staff being mostly locals who were given tries and successfully fitted with the job requirements. It was highlighted that the Station had 50 percent listenership in Manicaland and the other 50 was covered by National FM. The performance of the Station was deemed impressive as it managed to break even within 5 years since it operationalized. The proximity of Mutare to Mozambique benefits the radio station as it is sometimes engaged by the Mozambique authorities to pass important information to its citizens.

4.5.3 The Committee was informed that the Manica Post produces newsprint on a weekly basis and news coverage was for activities in the Manicaland province and also on matters of national importance. Improvements in the media industry had seen the newspaper competing for headline stories with personal bloggers and online journalists who had been keeping the newspaper on its toes with news breaking out as it happens. This has resulted in the newspaper establishing an online daily news platform which keeps its viewers up to date whilst waiting for the weekly newsprint.

4.5.4 The Committee was informed that 87.5% of workers were vaccinated at Manica post and 54 % at Diamond FM. The Zimpapers Management in Mutare highlighted that transport arrangements were in place for workers coming to work and it was operating at 40 percent capacity to decongest the work place whilst the others were working offsite. In addition, Diamond FM and Manica Post had reduced live interviews and was now relying on telephone interviews.

## **4.6 Challenges being faced at ZIMPAPERS**

- 4.6.1 The Committee was informed that the costs involved in using Transmedia services were not feasible as it required US\$11 000 for digital broadcasts.
- 4.6.2 It was highlighted that the weekly magazines were now being forced to compete with online bloggers and journalists who publish news and stories without verification or censorship which affected the relevance of weekly newspapers.
- 4.6.3 The CEO submitted that there were too many red tapes around Covid-19 information as media practitioners had no access to information of statistics for areas they provided media coverage, as information was centralized and came from Harare.
- 4.6.4 Another challenge highlighted was that female sources were hesitant to partake in news coverage. Further, he highlighted that there were dangers which existed when one attempts to cover stories that involve politically exposed persons (PEPs) on issues such as corruption, abuse of power and smuggling.

## **4.7 Hevoi FM**

### **4.7.1 An overview of the Hevoi Fm**

- 4.7.1.1 The Committee visited Hevoi FM, which is one of the radio stations owned by AB communications broadcasting on the 100.2 frequency. The Committee was informed that the commercial radio station was launched in July 2017 as part of Government's commitment to opening up the airwaves to create a platform for people to tell their own stories, aspirations, successes and also struggles. The station broadcasts music and news bulletin and the radio signal for Hevoi FM was accessible in the following areas, Mberengwa, Rutenga, Chatsworth, Mvuma, Gutu and Chilonga and broadcasts in Chitsonga, Karanga and English.
- 4.7.1.2 The Committee was informed that the Station has a radio listenership of 5 percent in the Masvingo Province whilst National FM enjoys both great coverage and listenership in the country. Management at the Station indicated that they had plans to set up transmission sites at Rutenga and Chatsworth, and also planned to lower the frequency of the Station to below 90 which was easily accessible in motor vehicles. The Committee also heard that the Station had taken advantage of Covid-19 to move towards digitalization which provided 15 percent of its total listeners.

#### **4.7.2 Financing of Hevoi Fm**

4.7.2.1 The Station Manager submitted that the revenue of the station was from airtime and was used to cover the operating expenses and highly prioritized payment of its staff. During the Covid-19 period, the station had been relying on donors who used the coverage of the radio station for awareness campaigns. Retailers and local businesses in Masvingo also form part of the stakeholders whom the radio relies on for revenue through adverts, however due to lockdown measures that were introduced, the suspension of live broadcasts and road shows when the economy slowed down negatively affected revenue generation for the station.

#### **4.7.3 Adaptation to COVID 19 Pandemic**

4.6.3.1 The Management at the Station indicated that they had been receiving help from Nyaradzo which donated PPEs and sanitizer for its employees, and also ZIMRA chipped in by setting up temperature testing equipment for visitors at the entrance of the building which houses the Station.

#### **4.8 Challenges being faced at Hevoi FM**

4.8.1 The Station Manger highlighted that there was erratic power supply from ZESA which affected airwave coverage and currently the station had no alternatives for power supply. The Committee was apprised that ZESA was switching off power between 5am and 11pm at Devure transmission site which affected radio coverage to areas far from Masvingo.

4.8.2 The Committee was informed that the Station was technically understaffed and requires more people to fill in all positions at the Station. Transport costs were taking a toll on the operations of the Station. On a weekly basis the Station required 400 liters of diesel which was used for transportation of workers to and from work, and also hired vehicles to access the transmission site out of town.

4.8.3 The Station Manager submitted that revenue from donor agencies provided means of revenue income for the Station. However, donor funded programmes were not all year round and had an operation time frame such that the Station was mostly financial stranded and required assistance from sponsors and Government. Government had promised to provide funding through the Ministry and a budget of US\$15 000 was submitted by the Station, but no funds had been availed to date.

## **4.9 The Breeze FM (Victoria Falls)**

### **4.9.1 An overview of the Breeze Fm**

4.9.1.1 The Committee was informed that the Breeze FM was a commercial radio station owned by Kaito Media which also owns Skyz FM and broadcasts in Bulawayo. Broadcast for the Breeze FM extensively covers a 160km radius in the Matabeleland North region covering areas such as Victoria Falls, Kazungula, Livingstone and Hwange. Due to its extensive coverage, it broadcasted in 7 languages, that is, Ndebele, Shona, English, Tonga, Nambia, Dombwe and Nyanja. It was highlighted that the radio station had a staff compliment of 13 and due to Covid-19 it was operating at 50 percent whilst the others were working from home.

### **4.9.2 State of equipment**

4.9.2.1 During the visit, the Committee was informed that Breeze FM had dual core computers, they were currently using a stand-by mixer model (Hybrid sc6215p) and they had one condenser mic and three standard microphones which were working. Further, the Station Manager highlighted that they had a control room with encoder and the station had a well-functioning backup solar system that keeps the station powered up during times of electricity power cuts.

### **4.9.3. Financing of the Station**

4.9.3.1 The Committee gathered that revenue streams of the station include radio airtime, jingles, live shows advertising, live broadcasts, sponsored shows, live reads, infomercials, product endorsement, brand Ambassadors and talent fees. However, the station Management informed the Committee that they sometimes do community service by disseminating Covid-19 related information whenever they can so as to keep the public aware of the risk posed by the pandemic, how to prevent exposure and what to do when they test positive.

### **4.9.4 Adaptation to Covid 19**

4.9.4.1 Management at the station revealed that it was providing PPEs such as masks and hand sanitisers to staff, professionally disinfecting studios in between shifts, and was also providing transport for its workers to and from work using the station's vehicle. It was submitted that stakeholders such as Nyaradzo, MISA and International Media Support (IMS) had chipped in to support the station by providing PPEs for all of the staff at the

station. The Committee was informed that all the staff at the station were vaccinated voluntarily. The Media company acknowledged the role that has been played by the Ministry of recognizing media practitioners as essential services which helped them access areas for news coverage as well as getting vaccinated.

#### **4.10 Challenges being faced at Breeze FM**

4.10.1 The Management briefed the Committee that heavy taxation on the station's operations was extensively affecting the profit margin for private Media companies in the country. In this context, the license fees were pegged at ZWL\$500 000 per month for each radio station, BAZ and ZIMURA were collecting 5 percent and 1 percent respectively of the station's gross revenue, and in addition ZIMURA was also collecting its share. More so, commercial radios were required to pay radio license fees to ZBC which is also a competitor on the media market and the current set up does not promote new players to join the industry as they end up being suffocated by the operating environment.

4.10.2 The Committee was informed that the lockdown measures that were put in place by the Government affected revenue streams for the commercial radio station with the suspension of live broadcasts and roadshows. In this regard, the Media company used to get revenue from promoting local tourism and other commercial businesses, however the closure of shops and movement restrictions for people meant that businesses had to withdraw and look for alternative means to showcase their businesses.

4.10.3 The Station Manager highlighted that transportation of journalists to source areas was proving expensive under the current conditions where no public transport was being availed to media practitioners in the province and countrywide. The Media company bemoaned the lack of subsidies in this sector as it had greatly affected their finances as the Government directed all public operators to join the ZUPCO brand or park their vehicles and their withdrawal was significantly felt in Victoria Falls.

4.10.4 Management at the station revealed that high pricing of accommodation in Victoria Falls proved to be expensive and demotivated experienced media practitioners from other towns to be attracted to the station. The Media company therefore made a request for the Committee to plead on behalf of media practitioners operating in Victoria Falls to be given land to build accommodation facilities they can all use like what other institutions like ZESA, the Department of Immigration services did in the city.

4.10.5 The Media company stressed that Covid-19 relief packages were not being extended to media practitioners by the Government despite having been recognized as essential services and also frontline workers who disseminate corona virus information and coverage to the public. Further, the Management of the station stressed that media practitioners were not being provided with information/statistics on time relating to Covid-19 as well as where vaccines were being accessed in Victoria Falls and its surroundings. To this end, it was delaying the dissemination of information to the public who needed the necessary updates on the pandemic.

4.10.6 It was highlighted that decentralization of services was taking long to be implemented for services to reach people who live far away from bigger cities. In this context, it was submitted that Zimbabwe Media cards which were renewed annually were taking long to reach media practitioners in Victoria Falls as they would get them in August whilst expiring in December. The time taken between the application and issuing period was long and it affected media coverage as media practitioners will not be allowed to practice without up-to-date media cards.

4.10.8 The Committee gathered that the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) has been delaying the movement of media practitioners as they go about their work despite the latter having being declared part of the essential services and with supporting documentation attesting to that. There was need for synergy and effective communication between the ZRP and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services on the status of media practitioners during the corona virus period.

4.10.9 There was lack of foreign currency to fund for the setting up of a transmission site at the tune of US\$11 000, and buying a transmitter which costs US\$8 000. The Committee was apprised that access to this money was difficult as the station charged its services in ZWL currency.

#### **4.11 Challenges in general affecting the operations of Media practitioners**

4.11.1 In an oral evidence held with MISA Zimbabwe, it was highlighted that safety and security of the media was a problem in Zimbabwe. The Committee was apprised that 52 cases of violations against journalists and media workers were recorded in the year 2020 and a report was provided with regards to the state of media in 2020. However, the Permanent Secretary highlighted that these were only allegations as journalists may have

encountered some inconveniences as they were asked to wait for some few hours during Covid-19 lockdown restrictions and they might have considered it as harassment.

4.11.2 It was further highlighted that laws such as Interception of Communications Act; Censorship and Entertainment Controls Act; Official Secrets Act; Criminal Law (Codification and Reforms) Act; and a horde of statutory instruments, among others violate Sections 57, 61 and 62 of the Constitution which provides for rights to privacy, expression and media freedom and the right to access to information.

4.11.3 The President of Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ) during an oral evidence meeting apprised the Committee that there was a discrepancy in the working conditions of journalists as employers had their own conditions which were not favourable for journalists. In this regard journalists requested for an establishment National Employment Council that will deal the issues of these discrepancies and better remuneration among others.

4.11.4 The Committee was informed by the ZUJ official that that there were multiple accreditations of journalists for instance when covering Parliament, they have to be accredited by Parliament. He further highlighted that the requirement that a journalist who was already accredited with ZMC needed further accreditation was time consuming.

4.11.5 The Permanent Secretary highlighted that Zimbabwe's media sector was taking too long to adapt and evolve in line with new technologies in the industry. This affected the quantity, quality and uptake of media products/content such as print publications, news, music, drama, documentaries and films.

4.11.6 The Committee was informed by the Permanent Secretary that the media environment continues to exhibit certain elements of polarisation resulting from possibly anti-Government editorial policies as reflected in conflicting news reports that make it difficult for news writers and consumers (readers, listeners and viewers) to obtain a true picture of developments. It was highlighted that the polarisation continues despite Government's national image building efforts.

4.11.7 The Permanent Secretary informed the Committee that concerns were brought to their attention on issues relating to the professional conduct of media practitioners such as khaki envelope journalism and undue influence by influential people which sometimes leads to self-censorship. This was exacerbated by poor remuneration for instance at ZBC where the least employee gets a salary of ZWL 16 000.

4.11.8 During the oral evidence meeting, the Advertising Media Association (ADMA) official highlighted that there were billboards clutter especially in Harare due to lack of regulation on the allocation spacing of billboards.

4.11.9 The Committee was informed that there were high levels of vandalism and theft of billboard structure.

4.11.10 The Committee was informed that the advertising industry was affected by high inflation and escalating operating costs amid constrained revenues and for start-ups the entry costs were too high.

#### **4.12. Measures being taken by the Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services in ensuring a conducive environment for media practitioners.**

4.12.1 The Committee had a meeting with the Permanent Secretary and visited a number of media houses. During the meeting and visits it was highlighted that the Ministry played an important role in ensuring a conducive environment for Media practitioners through classification of Media practitioners as essential services since the outbreak of the corona virus and prioritization for Covid 19 vaccination which they acquired without challenges. It was further highlighted that the Ministry facilitated for Covid 19 testing of Media practitioners at different occasions and it encouraged decongestion in the workplaces. Additionally, the Ministry encouraged virtual conferences and the harnessing of technologies in news gathering and dissemination, reducing contact between media practitioners and news sources.

4.12.2 The Permanent Secretary highlighted that they issued clearances for foreign journalists to enable them to obtain visas for entering the country, get accredited by the Zimbabwe Media Commission and to work on their assignments in Zimbabwe.

4.12.3 The Permanent Secretary pointed out that some journalists find it difficult to pay the Zimbabwe Media Commission registration fees at once, thus the Ministry through the Commission in the interim made a decision to accept instalments from journalists who were unable to make a once-off payment in order to address the challenge.

## **5.0 Committee Observations**

- 5.1 The Committee noted that transport was essential and media practitioners' work involved moving from one place to another using vehicles, thus management of different stations should provide decent transport.
- 5.2 The Committee observed that ZBC needed to be capacitated with microphones that can be used individually so as to reduce the spread of corona virus;
- 5.3 The Committee noted that bandwidth above 90MHz cannot be accessed by ex-Japanese cars which were owned by most of the stations' listeners. The listeners will have to buy bandwidth extenders hence increasing cost in order to access information
- 5.4 The Committee expressed great concern over the idea that Breeze Fm was paying licenses to ZBC who was also their competitor. Additionally, it was noted that some commercial radio station such as Breeze FM and Freelance journalists were not provided with PPEs by government.
- 5.5 The Committee concur with the idea of establishing a National Employment Council that will deal with the welfare of journalists. The Committee observed that several witnesses were pushing for a clause on establishment of a media council that was included in the proposed Media Practitioner's Bill.
- 5.6 It was observed that the accreditation of journalists by the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) was recognised as legal in Zimbabwe as stated in the Constitution. The Committee noted that for security reasons there was need for journalists to be accredited with different institutions when covering events. However, the Committee highlighted that multiple accreditation should not be used as a method of denying or blocking other journalists in covering other events.
- 5.7 The Committee commended media houses for adhering to Covid 19 regulations set by World Health Organisation and Government of Zimbabwe in fighting against Corona virus despite the economic challenges faced.

## **6.0 Recommendations**

- 6.1 The Committee recommends the following:
- 6.1.1 That the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development should warehouse ZBC's legacy debt by June 2022;

- 6.1.2 Transmedia Corporation should facilitate a conducive environment through infrastructural investments by setting up transmitters all over the country by September 2022;
- 6.1.3 Zimbabwe Media Commission should speed up the accreditation and registration process of journalists and media companies and cards should reach journalists in areas such as Victoria Falls by April 2022;
- 6.1.4 The Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services should assist ZBC by increasing its collection points for revenue through mandating other parastatals such as ZESA and Telone to collect license fees on behalf of the corporation by August 2022;
- 6.1.5 BAZ should reduce the radio bandwidth to less than 90km so that it can be accessed by several listeners by May 2022;
- 6.1.6 The Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services should establish a National Employment Council that will deal with the welfare of Media practitioners by August 2022;
- 6.1.7 The Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services should by August 2022 review and align laws that regulate the Media environment with the Constitution such as the Censorship and Entertainment Controls Act, Official Secrets Act, sections of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act, Interception of Communications Act;
- 6.1.8 The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development and the Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services should assist media houses in accessing foreign currency to acquire equipment by July 2022; and
- 6.1.9 Media houses should continue adhering to the set regulations and encourage regular testing and vaccination of its staff members.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

7.1 Media plays a vital role in enhancing development in the country through dissemination of information on government policies to the general public. It was noted that the media houses in Zimbabwe have done creditable work in ensuring accessibility of information despite the challenges faced. It is therefore critical that the media industry be promoted through a legislative framework that allows for freedom of expression and access to information as enshrined in section 61 and 62 of the Constitution.

