

Zim: Community radio lobby criticises government

By [Dumisani Ndlela](#)

10 Nov 2010

The Zimbabwe Association of Community Radio Stations (ZACRAS) has criticised government for failing to license independent broadcasters in the country, describing recent changes to the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) Act as saddening.

Government recently amended the BSA Act by providing for the arrest of persons tampering with broadcasting equipment, a fortnight after the Minister of Media, Information and Publicity Webster Shamu and the parliamentary committee on standing rules and orders called for the appointment of a properly constituted Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) to allow the opening of the airwaves.

Overhauling media laws

"While ZACRAS recognises the importance of safeguarding broadcasting equipment, it nevertheless believes that there is need for the complete overhaul of stringent media laws, amongst them BSA, instead of making piecemeal amendments," the association said.

It said the country's constitution acknowledged the right to freedom of expression, which also entails freedom of the media.

"Presently, Zimbabwe has no community radio station in operation. This is despite the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation's failure to adequately cover all regions in Zimbabwe. The existence of community radios will go a long way in ensuring that various communities are able to participate in the governance process thereby enabling them to be their own agenda setters and not mere information consumers," ZACRAS said.

Reforms not implemented

A senior member of the inclusive government, formed by ZANU PF and the two former opposition MDC party formations, told a MISA broadcasting conference in Harare that there was lack of implementation of broadcasting reforms agreed prior to the formation of the government.

He said the parties to the inclusive government had agreed that BAZ would flight applications for prospective broadcasters and process them in the time frames set by President Robert Mugabe, Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and his Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara.

"Regrettably, nothing has happened. It means that what was agreed by the political parties has not been implemented," said Welshman Ncube, a constitutional lawyer and Minister of Industry and Commerce in the inclusive government.

He said there was no excitement from the line minister to expedite the process. The portfolio is controlled by a ZANU PF minister.

"We have a situation where even though the legal framework permits, we still have no movement and are unlikely to have movement particularly now that for one reason or another, we are slowly retreating as political parties to our political mode trenches," said Ncube.

ABOUT DUMISANI NDLELA

Dumisani Ndlela is a Zimbabwean journalist specialising in business and financial reporting, with experience reporting on commodities, stock and financial markets, advertising, marketing and the media. He has previously reported from a number of regional countries as well as from the UK and Germany on commodities and regional integration. He can be contacted on dndlela@yahoo.co.uk

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