

Media Alert

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Journalist arrested for taking pictures of queues for basic commodities

Police in the Midlands town of Gweru on 21 August 2008 arrested Rutendo Mawere a correspondent with The Standard privately owned weekly newspaper after she took pictures of a crowd that included soldiers and policemen queuing for basic commodities in the city.

Mawere was arrested by a plainclothes policewoman identified as Million outside a shop which was selling cooking oil and laundry soap. She was taken to Gweru Central Police Station and questioned on why she had taken the pictures by officers from the Law and Order Section. Mawere who is duly accredited as a journalist in terms of the repressive Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) was released without being charged after being questioned for about an hour. The officers who were led by Assistant Inspector Mudzawa, accused her of taking the pictures so that she could write that the police and soldiers “always loot basic commodities”.

MISA-Zimbabwe position

MISA-Zimbabwe condemns the incident as a serious violation of the 1991 Windhoek Declaration which stipulates that members states, Zimbabwe included, should work towards the creation of an environment in which the media enjoys freedom of expression, independence from political, economic and commercial interests, pluralism of views and opinions.

Davison Maruziva, the editor of The Standard who described the conduct of the police as “most unfortunate and totally unnecessary”, said the incident demonstrated the hostility of law enforcement agents towards journalists working for the private media. “The arrest just goes to show that there is no let up in the police harassment of our journalists. It is ironic that this should be taking place against the backdrop of the talks by the major political parties in the country,” said Maruziva.

The regional chairperson of the National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations Peter Muchengeti condemned the continued harassment of journalists in Zimbabwe.

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