



2024

Annual Report



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CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

In October 2024, MISA Zimbabwe held its elective annual general meeting, which, in accordance with its constitution and corporate governance ethos, ushered in new members to its National Governing Council (NGC).

I was elected unopposed as Chairperson of the NGC, succeeding Golden Maunganidze after the conclusion of his two consecutive three-year terms in office, as stipulated by the MISA Zimbabwe and MISA Regional constitutions, respectively.

On behalf of the new NGC, I would like to pay special tribute to Maunganidze and his resilient team for maintaining the MISA Zimbabwe ship afloat in line with the organisation's 2021 – 2025 Strategic Plan, mission, vision, and values.

Through their selfless commitment, along with that of the Secretariat, which Dr Tabani Moyo ably and competently leads, the organisation continues to break new ground in its quest to secure a conducive operating environment where citizens can enjoy their rights to freedom of expression and access to information. This 2024 annual report will showcase this.

In this regard, Zimbabwe has observed a decline in instances of media freedom violations, advancing 10 places from 126 in 2023 to 116 in 2024 in Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index rankings and the collaborative State of Press Freedom in Southern Africa report, which tracks the progression of Sustainable Development Goal 16.1 by the MISA Regional Office and the UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa.

This occurred against the backdrop of a decrease in media freedom violations in 2023, leading to an improved media operating environment during Zimbabwe's 2023 election season.

There is still more to be done to ensure a supportive media operating environment; hence, our commitment to the domestication of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

We therefore reiterate our firm view that the adoption and localisation of the United Nations Plan of Action (UNPA) on the Safety of Journalists, as part of concrete efforts to end impunity for crimes against journalists, will be the icing on the cake that will propel Zimbabwe onto the progressive path of a free and unhindered media.

On the other hand, Zimbabweans are increasingly using the Freedom of Information Act to fulfil their right to access information on issues of concern. This fosters accountability and transparency in the administration of public resources.

The exercise of the right to access information, as stipulated by the Freedom of Information Act, has enabled citizens to enjoy and defend other rights, such as the right to housing, a clean environment, and the resolution of human-wildlife conflict.

This follows extensive training of community-based organisations (CBOs), journalists, and citizens by the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) and MISA Zimbabwe. Likewise, the ZMC has issued release orders to public institutions that must provide the requested information.

However, some public institutions are still to appoint designated information officers or develop information disclosure policies as required by the Freedom of Information Act. This situation continues to undermine citizens' right to access information.

Our programming in 2024 was also intentionally adjusted to showcase and raise awareness of the potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to enhance and transform all sectors of the African social system.

Africa, including Zimbabwe, should, therefore, approach AI strategically, focusing on its unique challenges and solutions rather than simply replicating techniques from the Global North.

Collaboration and investment in the public and private sectors are crucial for establishing the necessary infrastructure and promoting capacity building in digital skills. MISA Zimbabwe is working with key stakeholders, including the government, towards that goal.

We therefore welcome the government's announcement that a national artificial intelligence (AI) policy framework has now been completed as part of efforts to accelerate digital transformation in Zimbabwe.

Suffice it to say, the great strides and milestones we achieved in 2024 despite the socio-economic and political turbulence we may have encountered would not have been possible without the key partnerships and collaborations we forged with critical stakeholders.

We sincerely appreciate the Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services, Ministry of Information Communication Technology, Postal and Courier Services, Parliament of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Media Commission, Zimbabwe Republic Police, Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ), funding partners, and colleagues under the auspices of the Media Alliance of Zimbabwe.

Finally, we would like to give special commendation to our Advocacy Committees and entire membership—brand visibility—for organising and implementing the organisation's national and grassroots outreach programmes and activities in accordance with our mission, vision, and values.

MISA Zimbabwe Chairperson

Passmore Kuzipa

OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

As the year ended, pressure mounted on Zimbabwe to withdraw the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Amendment Bill, which was widely criticised for being designed to restrict civic society and muzzle dissenting voices.

According to NewsDay, dated 11 December 2024, United Nations special rapporteurs on human rights urged the government to withdraw the Bill entirely, stating that it represents an assault on democratic principles.

UN special rapporteurs Gina Romero, Irene Khan, Mary Lawlor and Ben Saul expressed concern regarding the Bill's implications for human rights, particularly the right to freedom of association once it is enacted into law.

They stated that the alleged differing versions of the Bill passed by the Senate and the House of Assembly created confusion and violated Section 131 of the Constitution, which specifies that both houses of Parliament must pass the same Bill.

The special rapporteurs urged President Emmerson Mnangagwa to initiate a new process to replace the current Bill, which was awaiting presidential assent after being passed by the Senate on 17 October 2024.

Critics of the Bill believe it is intended to close the democratic space and interfere with the operations of NGOs.

On a positive note, during the year under review, Zimbabwe continued to experience a decline in incidents of media freedom violations.

Zimbabwe climbed 10 places from 126 in 2023 to 116 in 2024 in Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index rankings. This improvement occurred against the backdrop of a reduction in media freedom violations in 2023, leading to a better media operating environment during Zimbabwe's 2023 election season. This is aptly captured in the State of Press Freedom in Southern Africa Report (2024).

In 2023, MISA Zimbabwe recorded 16 incidents of media freedom violations compared to 24 in 2022. This marked a 33.3 percent decrease in media violations in 2023, and this downward spiral continued in 2024.

In 2024, we recorded eight (8) incidents of media freedom violations. This represented a 50% decrease in media freedom violations during the year under review compared to the number recorded in 2023.

Meanwhile, in November 2024, the government gazetted the Broadcasting Services Amendment Bill 2024, paving the way for nationwide parliamentary public hearings on the Bill, which commenced in Harare on 16 December 2024.

The Bill, among other issues, aims to align the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ)'s oversight role with the Constitution and the Public Entities and Corporate Governance Act, while modernising and industrialising the sector.

It includes progressive provisions based on submissions made by key stakeholders like MISA Zimbabwe and the umbrella Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ), among others, during the earlier consultative processes and Writeshops with crucial stakeholders such as the government parliamentarians.

Its emphasis on enhancing transparency, fostering inclusivity, and promoting local content is commendable. However, it also includes certain problematic provisions that require fine-tuning to align with the best regional and international practices.

In a positive development for Zimbabwe's digital telecommunications ecosystem, Elon Musk, the founder of Starlink, announced that the high-speed, low-latency internet service has activated its signal and is now available in the country.

This is indeed a game-changer for connectivity in remote areas, as it will empower marginalised communities with the tools needed for education, healthcare, business, and personal development.

Zimbabweans have long complained of high-cost internet, low speeds, and poor connectivity services, hence MISA Zimbabwe's #DataMustFall campaign over the years. Starlink's entry provides competition in the Internet space for improved services and bridging the digital divide.

However, MISA Zimbabwe continues to advocate for developing policies that promote infrastructure improvement in telecommunications systems rather than depending on 'wholly imported' technology such as the Low Earth Orbit Satellite (LEOS). The aim is to connect the entire society sustainably. This requires transparent management and deployment of the Universal Services Funds (USF) to ensure the whole country is connected, leaving no one behind.

PROGRAMMES

Broadcasting Sector

MISA Zimbabwe and the Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ) organised caucus meetings and participated in public hearings in Harare, Marondera, Mutare, Masvingo, Bulawayo, Bubi, and Kwekwe to mobilise citizens and key stakeholders, articulating their positions on the Broadcasting Services Amendment Bill.

Radio programmes were also held with ZiFM Stereo in Harare and Great Zimbabwe Campus Radio in Masvingo for broader audience reach and mobilisation of the organisations' positions on the Bill.

Stakeholders such as journalists, people with disabilities, content creators and academics attended the hearings.

Participants generally focused on Section 38 of the Bill on the ZBC licence fees. Some of the participants supported this proposal even though their reasons for doing so were not coherent.

However, most speakers said the ZBC should reform its corporate governance structure to ensure accountability in using the funds and transform into a truly independent public broadcaster in a professional manner.

Also in contention was the entrenchment of too much power in the minister in the appointment of the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe's board.

In Harare, MAZ Chairperson Perfect Hlongwane said appointments to the BAZ board must be conducted transparently and publicly, with all qualified candidates selected on merit, free from political influence.

He stated that the Bill necessitated considerable refinement to guarantee independence and transparency in the long-term development of the sector.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Public accountability and transparency

During the year under review, MISA Zimbabwe, in collaboration with other key stakeholders, made great strides in enhancing citizens' right to access information. This right is aptly captured by the theme of the 2024 International Day for Universal Access to Information: Mainstreaming Access to Information and Participation in the Public Sector.

This followed intense training of community-based organisations (CBOs), journalists and citizens in general by the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) and MISA Zimbabwe.

Citizens are increasingly utilising the Freedom of Information Act to exercise their right to access information on matters of concern, thereby promoting accountability and transparency in the management of public resources.

Access to information has empowered citizens to enjoy and defend other rights, such as the right to shelter/housing, a clean environment, and the solution of human-wildlife conflict. Increasingly, appeals are also being lodged with the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) as provided by the law, where requests for information would have been denied.

According to the ZMC, some of the appeals were lodged by citizens in rural areas, signaling increased awareness of the right to know.

MISA Zimbabwe is, however, concerned that some public institutions still do not appoint designated information officers or develop information disclosure policies as required by the Freedom of Information Act. This situation continues to undermine citizens' right to access information.

While the ZMC noted an increase in the number of appeals lodged by marginalised

communities, citizens in rural areas need more ready access to the forms required to make information requests.

Some citizens continue to traverse long distances to obtain a printer and utilise the prescribed Freedom of Information Act request form. This issue must be addressed to ensure that public institutions in rural areas provide and proactively disclose information.

Nyanga Information Hub

The Hub was established to bridge the access to information gap by providing Information Communication Technology facilities and complementing the government's efforts to enrich citizens' right to access information through its Community Information Centres across Zimbabwe.

In that regard, MISA Zimbabwe worked closely with Munyaradzi HIV and AIDS Trust, a local community-based organisation based at St. Mary Magdalene's High School.

As a result, the information hub could be used by community members, including local villagers, medical practitioners, teachers, and students.

Established in March 2020, the Nyanga Information Hub and three other Hubs in Gwanda, Gweru, and Lupane proved particularly impactful during the COVID-19 pandemic. Community members, including local teachers and parliamentarians, used the hubs' facilities to access crucial information and disseminate awareness about COVID-19.

MEDIA AND LEGAL SUPPORT

Police-Media Engagement Meetings

On 24 May 2024, the MISA Advocacy Committees led police-media engagement meetings in Kariba, Gwanda, Bulawayo, Kwekwe, Gweru, Mutare, Harare, and Masvingo as part of the Provincial World Press Freedom Day Commemorations.

- In Masvingo, journalists now benefit from a dedicated WhatsApp group that facilitates regular communication with the police and its provincial commanders. This initiative has been instrumental in reducing tensions and strengthening relationships between the police and journalists in the province.

- MISA Zimbabwe Chinhoi Advocacy Committee Chairperson Conrad Mupesa engaged the police in Chinhoi on 21 November 2024 after journalist Naome Magorimbo was briefly detained after the police and Chinhoi Municipal Police accused her of taking pictures without their consent during a raid on vendors in the town.

He was accompanied by the ZUJ provincial chairperson for Mashonaland West, James Muonwa. The journalist was released without any charge.

The release of the Chinhoi journalist without being charged after the intervention of the MISA provincial chairperson demonstrates the effectiveness of previous police-media

engagement meetings held with the police in the town. Journalists and the police are now capacitated and better placed to amicably resolve potential conflict situations.

Accreditation of Journalists in Binga

On 22 February 2024, the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) accredited about 15 Binga-based journalists. The journalists had called MISA Zimbabwe to highlight their financial handicap, which hindered their ability to travel to Hwange for the ZMC's Media Accreditation Blitz.

They were also facing challenges in carrying out their lawful professional duties without being properly accredited by the ZMC.

Through MISA Zimbabwe's intervention and support, the Commission responded positively, and the journalists were accredited at Twasumpuka Community Radio Station in Binga, Matabeleland North Province.



Accreditation of journalists in Binga

Business Modelling Seminar

The Business Modelling Seminar was designed to equip participants from online media start-ups with effective business modelling strategies.

Tim Zunckel, an expert in media business sustainability, facilitated the seminar, along with Mukosha Funga from News Diggers in Zambia and Tinashe Munyuki from Daily Maverick in South Africa.

Participants reported a deeper understanding of the various elements influencing media business operations after the training.

One of the participants, journalist John Cassim, successfully established payment options for his website by the conclusion of the first day of the seminar. This came after a detailed discussion on methods for monetising content and websites.



Frame 1: Tim Zunckel addressing participants on analysing the operating environment.
 Frame 2: Participants working on a business model task.

SLAAP Seminar

MISA Zimbabwe, in collaboration with the International Senior Lawyers Project (ISLP), successfully hosted a two-day workshop on Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation (SLAPP) in Harare in June 2024.

This event brought together 26 legal professionals from across the country. Participants received advanced training in strategic litigation techniques to challenge laws and policies restricting media freedom and freedom of expression.

SLAPP lawsuits are usually targeted at journalists and activists who speak out on issues of public concern.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Resolution 522 Model Bill

On 8 October 2024, MISA Zimbabwe engaged with Parliamentarians from three Parliamentary Portfolio Committees, namely: Information Communication Technology, Postal and Courier Services, Media, Information and Broadcasting Services, and Women’s Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development.

The meeting’s objective was to lobby and advocate for the implementation of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) Resolution 522 on the Protection of Women Against Digital Violence in Africa.

The session also aimed to garner support from MPs for a proposed model bill aimed at amending the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act to address gaps in the current legislation concerning digital violence, particularly online abuse based on gender.

Resolution 522 on the Protection of Women Against Digital Violence in Africa highlights that “digital violence is increasingly gendered and disproportionately affects women, through inter alia threats of sexual violence, misogynistic disinformation campaigns and “revenge pornography...”

The Resolution encourages member states to take measures to safeguard women journalists from digital violence, including gender-sensitive media literacy and digital security training. It also calls on member states to facilitate cooperation between law enforcement and service providers to identify perpetrators and gather evidence of online harm.

INTERNET GOVERNANCE

Internet Governance Forum

On 20 March 2024, MISA convened an Internet Governance Forum in Harare. The Ministry of Information Communication Technology, Postal and Courier Services officials, legislators, media tech experts, academia, regulators and telecommunications industry representatives attended the meeting.

MISA launched its report on Artificial Intelligence in Southern Africa at the meeting. The report provides invaluable insights into the current uptake of AI in the region, its applications, and its role in disinformation, particularly during elections.

In her speech, Dr Tatenda Mavetera, the Minister of Information Communication Technology, Postal and Courier Services, stressed the need for a multi-stakeholder approach to crafting the AI regulatory framework.

She said: “To achieve a successful ICT policy, the regulatory environment needs to be reviewed, which involves reviewing some legislation.”

She said inadequate communication infrastructure, especially for people with special needs, was a great hindrance to access. The minister said the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ) should protect consumers against high data costs.

Rushinga MP Tendai Nyabani stressed the need to close the digital divide between urban and rural areas and revise data prices downwards. The government committed to working with MISA to develop an inclusive national AI regulatory framework.



MISA Zimbabwe National Director, Dr Tabani Moyo (in white shirt) at the Internet Governance Forum attended by ICT Minister Dr Tatenda Mavetera (in green dress).

REGIONAL COLLABORATIONS

Privacy Symposium Africa

MISA Zimbabwe, in collaboration with the Unwanted Witness and in association with the Hewlett Foundation and the Law Society of Zimbabwe, hosted the 6th Privacy Symposium Africa from November 19 to 21, 2024, in Harare.

The three-day symposium, which was themed “Bridging Policy, Technology, and Societal Dynamics,” aimed to foster dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders from across the continent and beyond.



Panel discussion on harnessing the power of Artificial Intelligence

More than 130 key stakeholders from Southern, East, and West African countries attended the Symposium. Key stakeholders from Zimbabwe included the Minister of Information Communication Technology, Postal and Courier Services, Dr Tatenda Mavetera, legislators, and representatives from the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ).

The discussions and deliberations centred on Election Data Governance, Privacy, Artificial Intelligence, Data Coloniality, Digital rights and nexus issues.

ELECTIVE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

MISA Zimbabwe held its elective Annual General Meeting on 25 October 2024 during which Passmore Kuzipa, former Chairperson of the Masvingo Advocacy Committee, was elected as the National Chairperson, Phyllis Kachere, Vice Chairperson, and Jeffrey Muvundusi and Albert Mazhale (former Gwanda Advocacy Chairperson), came in as the new committee members. Nokuthula Mahaka was retained as the Treasurer.

The AGM ended the two consecutive three-year terms of Golden Maunganidze (Chairperson), Ruth Butaumocho (Vice Chairperson) and Kenneth Matimaire and Pamenus Tusso (Committee Members).

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS

1. MISA Zimbabwe Analysis of the Broadcasting Services Amendment Bill <https://data.misa.org/en/entity/r5ocbi1tkaf>
2. A study of technology facilitated gender based violence in Southern Africa <https://data.misa.org/en/entity/l0qi10b55bf>
3. Policy Brief: Addressing The Gaps In The Data Protection, Privacy And Surveillance Legislation <https://data.misa.org/en/entity/mez0bnln52l>
4. Guide to Fact Checking and Information Verification <https://data.misa.org/en/entity/wzyzgoy4w6>



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