

President Emmerson Mnangagwa
Republic of Zimbabwe
A5, Samora Machel Ave and Sam
Nujoma Street
Harare, Zimbabwe

Paris, 31 August 2018

Dear President Mnangagwa,

After more than two decades of persecution of the media under President Robert Mugabe, regarded by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) as one of Africa's worst predators of press freedom, your election as president on 31 July raised the hopes of Zimbabwe's journalists.

We welcome the many promises you gave during your first nine months as president to amend the laws that impose severe curbs on press freedom. Nonetheless, the "new Zimbabwe" of which you spoke at your swearing-in on 26 August will not see the light of day if your promises are not translated into concrete action. Unfortunately, the legislation that oppresses the media has still not been changed, access to state-owned media was very unequal in the run-up to the election, and several journalists were physically attacked by the security forces. Zimbabwe is currently ranked 126th out of 180 countries in RSF's World Press Freedom Index.

During post-election demonstrations on 1 August, at least four journalists were the victims of violence. They included Yeshiel Panchia and Idah Mhetu, who were beaten by soldiers using leather whips and electric cables, and Joseph Cotterill, who was beaten with a riot shield by a policeman. Restrictions on access were also seen on 1 August, when reporters were prevented from going to an opposition press conference for several hours. And, despite identifying himself as a journalist, Tinotenda Samukange was arrested by soldiers as he tried to return home two days later.

RSF already voiced concern last June about the hostile climate for reporters in the run-up to the elections. One of your ministers even threatened a journalist with physical violence during a live radio debate. The violence that your predecessor's

government systematically used as a tool for controlling media coverage has no place in the “new Zimbabwe.”

So that Zimbabwe can improve its position in the next World Press Freedom Index, RSF recommends that you:

- End impunity by systematically prosecuting those responsible for violence against journalists, including members of the security forces and political party officials and activists.
- Raise awareness in the security forces and among political party activists about the need to respect journalists, who play a key role in the public debate.
- Amend or repeal the laws that restrict press freedom, above all the Public Order and Security Act (POSA), the Official Secrets Act (OSA), the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) and the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act. These laws limit the stories that journalists can cover and expose them to the possibility of long prison sentences.
- Transform the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) into a pluralistic public service broadcaster so that it can be much more than just a relay of the government’s activities.
- Open up broadcasting sector to actors from all political tendencies so that they can obtain TV and radio broadcast licences and so that media pluralism can finally become a reality in Zimbabwe.

As you know, Zimbabwe’s journalists are counting on you.

Sincerely,



Christophe Deloire
Secretary-General