



Zimbabwe Union of Journalists

ZUJ President New Year Statement (2024)

Once again we begin the new year on the back of a mixed year for journalists in Zimbabwe, most of whom had a bleak Christmas devoid of annual bonuses, capping a difficult year where poor salaries loomed large and continued to blemish and taint the journalism profession which is a vital cog in the national development matrix by virtue of being the eyes, ears and voice of the people.

As we start another year, we are compelled to reflect, as a profession, on a very difficult year that we are leaving behind as some journalists continued to struggle to put food on their tables because of non-payment of salaries and wages despite working tirelessly to keep the nation informed as the fourth estate of the realm.

Most employers in the industry did not only fail to pay journalists on time over the course of 2023, but also underpaid them, once again bringing to the fore the issue of poor working conditions for media practitioners and how this situation remains an existential threat to the profession.

We want to applaud media companies that managed to weather the storm and consistently paid salaries, reviewed them and even gave their employees bonuses. It is our firm belief that the only lasting solution to addressing the issue of poor salaries in the media industry lies in the setting up of a National Employment Council (NEC), which is long overdue.

As ZUJ, we implore government through the Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services, to spearhead the establishment of a NEC for the industry to save the profession that is under unprecedented threats from flight of skilled journalists thereby compromising the quality of news products.

Poor salaries also cause serious challenges such as brown envelope journalism that is blighting the profession.

We are heartened that the new Information Minister Dr Jenfan Muswere has shown willingness and flexibility to tackle some of the challenges affecting the industry, top of which is poor remuneration that can be addressed by a NEC. We are hopeful that the new Minister will shepherd the industry towards the birth of a NEC, ushering in a new epoch for journalism, in line with the spirit of inclusivity.

It is our hope that the new year will be a platform for renewed zeal and energy to engage, exchange ideas and proffer solutions that will permanently address poor salaries for journalists and media practitioners.

There is also optimism that Government will this year facilitate the advent of co-regulation in the industry through effecting the requisite legislative framework to usher in peer review like what obtains in other

professions as we continue to entrench pillars of democracy to pivot Zimbabwe towards other democratic and free dispensations the world over.

Passing of the Media Practitioners Bill should be a top priority in 2024, as it is a key proviso to engendering professionalisation of journalism, clearly defining who a journalist is and making such persons be bound by a code of conduct which undergird the existence of any profession.

As we go into 2024, we also look back at the year 2023 fondly, not only because Zimbabwe held its constitutionally mandated elections but also because of the improved climate for journalists which enabled them to do their work minus hindrance.

As ZUJ we want to commend the climate of peace and tolerance which existed before, during and after the elections and enabled journalists to do their work in a free environment.

We want to commend law enforcement agencies and government for ensuring that journalists were able to conduct their work without major hiccups. The rapport built between journalists through their representative bodies and representatives of security organisations and political parties is a harbinger of a new dispensation, characterised by tolerance that prevailed during the polls though there were some isolated incidences of journalists being harassed.

As we move into the future, we remain hopeful that a day will come when journalists will not be haunted and hounded for doing their work by authorities but rather be subjected to professional action in the event they violate their code of conduct.

It is our hope that we will continue to build on this growing close working relationship and consolidate the gains made in the prior year to strengthen the pedestal on which the pillars of media freedom in our country are anchored.

We continue to hope that the year 2024 will prove to be a period marking new milestones along the road to total media freedom though with responsibility to our great nation and its citizens.

I wish you all a rewarding 2024.

George Maonga
ZUJ President.