

Zambian ruling party members charged in TV crew attack

NEW YORK: Zambian law enforcement and judiciary officials must ensure that justice is fully served in Monday's attack against three television journalists and their driver, the Committee to Protect Journalists said on Wednesday, 20 July 2011. Two officials of the ruling Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) have been arrested in connection with the attack.



Reporter Dainess Nyrienda, camera operators Annita Kalwani and Emmanuel Kaluba, and driver Edward Ntele of Malawian independent broadcaster, Muvi Television, were assaulted by a crowd of MMD supporters while investigating allegations of illegal land seizures by party cadres in Nakachenje, west of the capital, Lusaka, according to local journalists and news reports.

Crowd attacked the crew

The crowd attacked the crew as it was interviewing a woman who had accused MMD officials of using intimidation to seize her property, according to news accounts and CPJ interviews. Assailants dragged Nyrienda and Kalwani into a ditch, where they attempted to disrobe the two female journalists, Muvi TV managing editor Costa Mwansa told CPJ. Their colleagues intervened, suffering minor injuries of their own, he said. In video broadcast by Muvi TV, Kalwani said the assailants tried to sexually assault her.

The crowd also seized a camera, tripod stand, and microphone along with personal items such as two cell phones, a wallet, and a coat, local journalists told CPJ. Most of the equipment was returned, although it was in poor, battered condition, Mwansa said.

Police arrested MMD cadres Moses Changala and Benjamin Mukadi, and charged them with assault, criminal trespass, and obtaining money by false pretenses, police spokeswoman Ndandula Siamana said. Police were questioning 44 other people in connection with Monday's attack, she added. Information minister Ronnie Shikapwasha condemned "the beating of journalists from Muvi TV by some people," and called the act "lawless, undemocratic and unacceptable," in a statement made Tuesday.

Concerned over ongoing anti-press violence

"While we are pleased that Zambian authorities have publicly condemned the heinous attack on our colleagues from Muvi Television, we are concerned by the ongoing anti-press violence meted by members of Zambia's ruling party," said CPJ East Africa consultant Tom Rhodes said. "We call on the Zambian judiciary to ensure the culprits face the full measure of the law."

Members of the ruling MMD party have been involved in previous anti-press violence, according to CPJ research. In November 2010, a magistrate convicted Lusaka Province MMD Youth chairman Chris Chalwe in the July 2009 beating of journalists Anthony Mulowa and Chibaula Silwamba, who were covering President Rupiah Banda's return from Uganda at Lusaka International Airport, according to news reports. Chalwe is free on bail pending his appeal of a one-year prison sentence for the incident, according to local journalists.

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