

## Zambia should halt harassment of *The Post*, M'membe

NEW YORK: The Committee to Protect Journalists has called on Zambian President Rupiah Bwezani Banda and his administration to halt the ongoing harassment of the nation's independent newspaper *The Post* and its award-winning editor Fred M'membe.

On Tuesday (1 June), a magistrate in the capital, Lusaka, convicted M'membe on a criminal charge of contempt of court and scheduled sentencing for Friday, defense lawyer Remmy Mainza told CPJ. M'membe, a 1995 recipient of CPJ's International Press Freedom Award, could face up to six years in prison, said Mainza. He said the defense would likely appeal the verdict.

"Fred M'membe's conviction appears to be part of the ongoing harassment against *The Post* since President Banda came into office in 2008," said CPJ Africa program coordinator Tom Rhodes. "This undermines Zambia's democratic credentials. We call on the administration to drop all legal proceedings against *The Post*."

The contempt charge, a misdemeanor, is based on *The Post's* publication of a 2009 op-ed by US-based law professor Muna Ndulo. The piece called the prosecution of *Post News* editor Chansa Kabwela on supposed pornography charges a "comedy of errors."

Under Zambian law, contempt charges can be used against those who publish commentary on ongoing court proceedings.

The government's case against Kabwela herself fell apart last year. She was dragged into court after mailing to several high-ranking government officials the unpublished photographs of a woman giving birth without medical assistance during a hospital strike. She said she did so to stir the government to bring an end to the labor dispute. Banda characterised the photographs as pornography, but a judge dismissed charges against Kabwela in November 2009.

CPJ has documented numerous instances in which supporters of Banda's ruling Movement for Multiparty Democracy party have harassed and attacked *The Post* and its journalists. Banda himself is a plaintiff in a civil lawsuit against *The Post* stemming from the paper's critical coverage of his 2008 presidential run. Mainza, the defense attorney, said that case is scheduled to be heard by the High Court on June 16.

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