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MEDIA ALLIANCE OF ZIMBABWE (MAZ) STATEMENT ON THREATS ON INDEPENDENT MEDIA BY THE CHINESE EMBASSY IN ZIMBABWE

14 July 2022

The Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ) is deeply concerned with the heightened threats against the Standard, a privately owned local news weekly, by the Chinese Embassy in Zimbabwe.

The Chinese Embassy, in a statement issued on the 11th of July 2022 threatened to take "strong counter measures" against the newspaper and a local media development agency, the Information for Development Trust (IDT).

In what amounts to a direct attack on media freedom, the Chinese Embassy issued these threats on the back of a series of stories critical of the operations of some Chinese companies operating in Zimbabwe published in the Standard in partnership with IDT.

While it is not peculiar that any individual, organization or even state can have issues with aspects in part or whole of a news story, it is unacceptable to charge against the media with unspecified actions.

Zimbabwe's Constitution protects the practice of journalism and related freedoms. The Constitution establishes a media commission among the institutions supporting democracy in the country.

At an operational level, the government of Zimbabwe has placed on record its commitment to a free media enterprise anchored on a co-regulatory framework and reform agenda.

This is the level at which Zimbabwe holds press freedom sacrosanct. It is a value that the global family of nations ascribe to in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which provides for media freedom without interference.

MAZ is thus taken aback by the intention of a foreign state, in the mould of a global power to counter a national media outlet with unspecified measures. It is more so worrying that the threats are issued without exhausting legal remedies provided for by the host nation.

Outside this diplomatic imperative, there are democratic ways in which any grievances against the media can be tabled.

The media actors concerned professionally associate with other organizations, both public and private, most of whom subscribe to a code of conduct enforced by a self-regulatory body, the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (VMCZ).

The Standard is also accredited by the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) which have a constitutional obligation to regulate the media.

The Embassy of China in Zimbabwe is therefore advised to take professional routes towards seeking redress, if they feel aggrieved, rather than issuing such chilling threats on the media.
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About MAZ

The Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ) is an alliance of media support organisations including the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe, Media Institute of Southern Africa (Zimbabwe chapter), Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ), Zimbabwe National Editors' Forum (ZINEF), Gender and Media Connect (GMC), the Media Centre, the Zimbabwe Association of Community Radio Stations (ZACRAS), the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (VMCZ) and the African Community Publishing Development Trust (ACPDT). MAZ work focuses on four key areas which are:

- Freedom of Expression
- Right to Information
- Media Freedom
- Media Law and policy Reform

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