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## Patriotic Front Heads Toward Confrontation with Online Media

Published July 25, 2012 By [James Kimer](#)



The ruling Patriotic Front party has increased its public criticism in recent months of online news media, arguing that a number of popular websites have been publishing false information and allegedly slanderous material regarding state officials.

The pressure culminated earlier this week when the Minister of Defence Godfrey Bwalya Mwamba (popularly known as GBM, who is a nephew of President Michael Sata) threatened [a seven-day ultimatum](#) against the government-critical website [Zambian Watchdog](#), demanding retraction of an

article, or else he would order police to act to shut down the website.

Today the tension increased, as the editors of the website responded with [a strongly worded refusal to the request of the defence minister](#). "What we wrote is true, accurate and precise. It was nothing but the truth; the whole truth," the statement reads.

In interview with the Daily Mail yesterday, Defence Minister Mwamba said that it is only a matter of time before the government moves in on online publications.

"For instance, I spent more than 50,000 British pounds to fly my children, grandchildren, wife and other relatives to witness my son Muma's graduation here," Mwamba said in the Daily Mail interview, referring to his son's graduation from Manchester University. "But what was reported was that myself and Honourable Chikwanda were visiting our President in hospital. This is wrong and heightens our desire to fairly and squarely deal with the purveyors of falsehoods using all the legal means available. To us, money is not an issue here."

Only a few days earlier another senior PF member, Wynter Kabimba, [also publicly criticized online media](#) outlets for allegedly insulting religious and tribal figures, and promised swift action on behalf of the ruling party.

Some media observers we spoke with said that these exchanges have put the PF on a collision course with online media – and it's not clear who will come out on the other side.

The tensions between the ruling party and critical journalists started much earlier. The threats to shut down websites were preceded by [a series of firings](#) of reporters from the state-owned Times of Zambia newspaper who were perceived to be disloyal to the ruling party, [interrogations of state media employees](#), a slew of [lawsuits](#) against the editors of the Daily Nation, an opposition-leaning publication, and [several arrests of journalists](#) and a jail sentence for a civil servant [who insulted the president](#).

The mainstream media market in Zambia is not considered diverse. There are only three newspapers with national reach – Times of Zambia, Zambia Daily Mail, and The Post Newspaper – of which two are government owned and the third is owned and edited by a close ally of the ruling party. Coincidentally, a controversy has erupted as Labour Minister [Fackson Shamenda has made statements](#) allegedly that the company owning the Times of Zambia is bankrupt. If the newspaper is privatized, [the most likely buyer is believed to be Defence Minister Bwalya](#).

Some journalists [say that they experience pressure to self-censure](#) their reporting on political issues.

Following the election of President Michael Sata, more than a dozen employees of The Post Newspaper were appointed to well paying government positions, including the president's spokesperson. "We are living in fear because we don't know whether to continue debriefing our bosses who in return report us to our government sources," said one journalist who spoke with Zambia Reports in April 2012. "What we've now resorted to is self censorship; we kill these stories the moment we realize they implicate government officials."

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Despite a very low internet penetration rate of **just 10%**, there are many people who fear that the government is determined to silence these internet publications, depriving opponents of the ruling party a voice to communicate their positions.

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## 5 Comments

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### Forum for AGE Justice international

Posted July 26, 2012 at 6:22 am | [Permalink](#)

We have a freedom of expression and publications. The website media must continue to practice this Right no matter how selfish people may use their current political power to kill what is the Voice of the marginalised Voiceless. Zambians have a Right to information and true information. The media has a moral Right to bring the truth to the citizens. There is nothing wrong to visit a President when he is being hospitalised; there is nothing wrong to inform the public about the illness of the public figure. Medication is one of the primal Right. We all need to protect our leadership whilst they are sick; and pray for them to God so that they get God's favour.

My advice to the leadership is that nepotism is corruption too; whilst we fight corruptions; we need to consider our government operations. For instance, the Cabinet is said to be full of Northerners; is it true; if yes lets revisit the issue of One Zambia, One Nation. There are also quality leaders in Southern, Central and Lumbas of Copperbelt Province.

Our dear Media staff in Zambia; we are behind you as your journey to reveal what is on the ground in truth; nothing but the truth.

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### Polio Chanda

Posted July 26, 2012 at 10:09 pm | [Permalink](#)

Editor, what has happened to "Helo Zambia"?

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### Editor

Posted July 26, 2012 at 10:18 pm | [Permalink](#)

I am not sure – it appears to be down. Perhaps it was hacked or ordered shut?

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### Realist

Posted July 28, 2012 at 9:05 am | [Permalink](#)

Great point AGE, GBM should be justifying his nepotist position unlike subjecting us to this gibberish.

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### Bambo XVI

Posted July 30, 2012 at 6:51 pm | [Permalink](#)

AGE Justice is Right! stop running Zambia like..... ! you are accountable to us.

