

World journalists back Daily News fight: 'Press Freedom's Biggest Battle in Africa'

The International Federation of Journalists today called for a worldwide campaign among journalists' groups to defend the Daily News in Zimbabwe after a weekend in which police closed down the independent daily for a second time and the paper's director was arrested at his home.

"This is Africa's biggest press freedom battle," said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary. "Journalists all around the world are outraged at the tactics of the Mugabe regime which are in defiance of the courts and international standards of human rights."

One of the paper's Directors, Washington Sansole, was detained yesterday only 24 hours after police went to the paper's offices and closed it down less than a day after it had reopened. Eighteen journalists were detained in the raid, the newspaper's lawyer said.

The independent newspaper, which has been highly critical of the government of Robert Mugabe, went on sale on Saturday, for the first time since police shut it down six weeks ago, having won a court ruling that the authorities were wrong to refuse the best selling newspaper a licence.

"The courts have ruled against strict media laws which stifle press freedom," said White, after the Harare Administrative Court decision ruled against the government-appointed Media and Information Commission which (MIC) has denied the Daily News a licence. In Friday's ruling, the judge said the commission had not been properly constituted. The MIC has been ordered to issue a licence by 30 November.

Mr Sansole was arrested at his home in Bulawayo on Sunday morning. The newspaper's legal advisor, Gugulethu Moyo, said the police wanted to interview the other eight company directors. His arrest follows action in September when police seized computer equipment and closed down the Daily News offices after a ruling by the Supreme Court said the paper was operating without a licence.

"The situation is now one where the actions of the authorities have been exposed as legally suspect and politically motivated," said Aidan White.

"Journalists throughout the region and around the world will campaign strongly for justice for the Daily News and its journalists. This latest action must not be allowed to stand."

Further information: + 32 2 235 22 00. The IFJ represents over 500,000 journalists in more than 100 countries.

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