

New president should prioritise press freedom

By [James Kunda](#)

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Media bodies in Zambia have called on the incoming republican president to prioritise press freedom as a prerequisite for national development.

Press Association of Zambia (PAZA) President, Andrew Sakala, said in an interview yesterday that his organisation would like to see journalists operating more freely without interference from those outside the profession.



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Sakala said the incoming Head of State should address certain provisions in the Constitution and the Penal Code that make journalists vulnerable to third party interference and other forms of abuse.

"Our expectation is that the new president will facilitate the enactment of the law such as the Access to Information Bill, which will favour the media to allow journalists to operate freely and independently," he said.

Four media institutions

He said the president to be elected on 20 January should revisit the policy of Government owning four media institutions as this was one of the reasons it was a challenge to recapitalise their operations.

"It is seemingly a challenge for Government to recapitalise Times of Zambia, Daily Mail, ZANIS and ZNBC all at once; this is why we feel that some of these institutions should be sold off to pave way for fresh capital injection under private hands," he

said.

Zambia Union of Journalists (ZUJ) president Shamaoma Musonda said in a separate interview that the next president must ensure that all media houses are adequately recapitalised to address the challenges they are experiencing.

This would ultimately lead to improved working conditions for journalists and alleviate the suffering that media personnel were going through.

Welfare of journalists

"Basically, we would like to see the incoming president take care of the welfare of journalists by recapitalising media institutions so that while meeting their statutory obligations, they can also offer improved working conditions for employees," he said.

Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Zambia Chapter Chairperson Helen Mwale challenged all presidential candidates to unveil their plans for the media. Mwale said her organisation was concerned that none of the presidential candidates had unveiled plans for the media in the ongoing electoral campaigns.

"It is disappointing that none of the presidential candidates is talking about what they will do for the media when voted into office and our call to them is that we the media personnel want to know what the next president will do for us when he assumes office on 20 January," she said.

Mwale said the new president should ensure that at the first seating of Parliament after the election, the Access to Information Bill should be passed to emphasise the significance of a free press.

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