

Zambian paper's staff summoned on contempt charges

NEW YORK: A magistrate in Zambia issued a summons today for the entire editorial staff of the southern African country's largest independent newspaper to appear in court on Wednesday, 2 September 2009 on contempt charges, according to local journalists and news reports. The ruling was prompted by an op-ed commenting on the prosecution of the paper's news editor.

The Post published on Thursday, 27 August 2009 an op-ed by a US-based contributor, Cornell University law professor Muna Ndulo, which was critical of the ongoing criminal prosecution of *Post* news editor Chansa Kabwela. Kabwela faces charges of circulating obscene materials after sending Zambian officials photographs of a woman giving birth without medical aid outside the University Teaching Hospital, which was affected by a health care worker strike at the time. Editors decided the pictures were too graphic for publication but felt it important to raise awareness among government leaders about the human impact of the strike.

Yesterday, 31 August, Magistrate Charles Kafunda, who is overseeing Kabwela's case, formally cited Ndulo and *Post* editor-in-chief Fred M'membe, a 1995 recipient of CPJ's International Press Freedom Award, for contempt in relation to the original dissemination of the photos, according to defense lawyer Sam Mujuda. The magistrate summoned the rest of the staff in relation to the op-ed. The charge carries a maximum penalty of six months in prison, Mujuda said.

"With each judicial action, Zambian authorities make this into a bigger story worldwide," said CPJ executive director Joel Simon. "Summoning an entire editorial staff over an opinion piece exposes the absurd lengths authorities are going to harass *The Post*."

Earlier this month, Zambian journalists took to the streets to protest at least 21 incidents of harassment this year, according to the Media Institute of Southern Africa. A magistrate recently lodged assault charges against a member of the ruling party for harassing *Post* reporter Chibaula Silwamba and Anthony Mulowa, a journalist for the state-run *Times of Zambia*, according to local news reports. The case is scheduled to go on trial on 17 September, according to Silwamba.

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