



Watch What You Say

In the majority of the cases (68% in 2015) that ZPP has recorded which are of a harassment and intimidation nature, most are insult-related violations. Some of the alleged insult violations escalated into assault as the victim was then assaulted for supposedly saying something thought to be derogatory about someone or an event.

Insult cases that have been brought to the courts in the past have been related to the person of the President. The cases that ZPP has recorded of alleged 'insults' this year were not necessarily words said against the President, but included anything said which was supposedly disparaging about the Zanu PF party, First Lady Grace Mugabe, factionalism within the Zanu PF party or even the economic situation prevailing in the country. ZPP has recorded several cases of individuals who had their rights violated for allegedly insulting Zanu PF, the President or the government. On 13 January 2015 in Binga North, Manjolo Ward at Damba business centre a man was verbally insulted and threatened with severe beating and arrest by Zanu PF ward chairperson Fidelis Mudimba and 6 ward youth officers. The victim was accused of blaming the Zanu PF leadership for failing to pay civil servants' salaries on time. The perpetrators further insulted the victim by calling him a sell-out and imperialist puppet.

At Mataka beerhall in Chegutu on the 24th of January 2015 a man was at the beer hall with friends discussing the economy. The victim alleged in his comments that it was because of the First Lady who is 'greedy' that the economy is suffering. A Zanu PF member approached the victim assaulted him until his clothes were covered with blood.

An MDC-T woman was harassed and threatened by Joseph Katuruza of Zanu PF at Mabodza business centre in Chiundura, Gweru in March for commenting on the poor state of the economy. In the same month in the same locality a man was verbally assaulted by a Zanu PF member for discussing issues of the economy. In Bindura an MDC-T man was assaulted in April for declaring that as a result of factionalism rocking Zanu PF the party had disintegrated (*yaora*). Whereas in Bulawayo an MDC-T member was beaten up by two Zanu PF members in April for allegedly claiming that the prophesy by prominent preacher T. B. Joshua, of an African leader dying was referring to the Zanu PF leader.

In the stated cases and many others documented expressing one's personal opinion can result in immediate physical punishment being meted out or threats being issued. It would appear that citizens are not free to discuss issues relating to the current economic environment which has a bearing on their wellbeing, factionalism within Zanu PF or Zanu PF leaders. The same topics however are the ones that are trending in most spaces be it in face to face discussions or on social media. While criminal charges may not be brought against an individual, however what is clear is that Zimbabweans are intolerant of other people's differing opinions. The intolerance presents itself in

the violation of a person's right to freedom of expression and conscience as guaranteed in sections 60 and 61 of the Constitution.

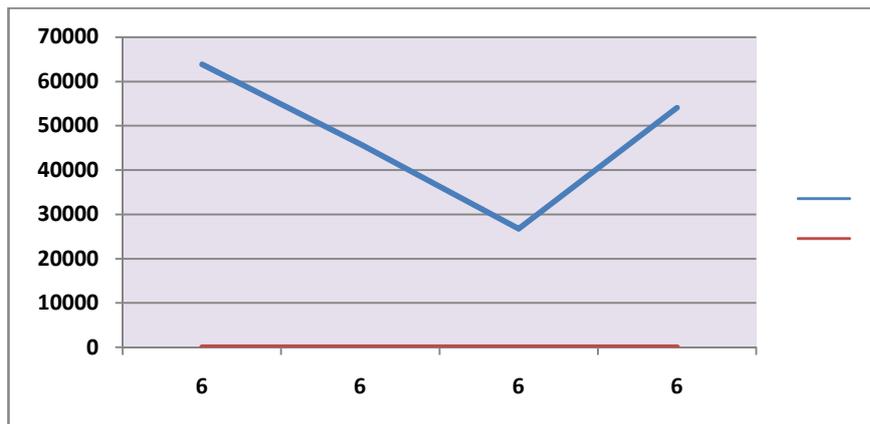


Figure 1: Violations documented between January and March

The years 2010 to 2014 saw a marked increase in the number of cases being brought to the courts of individuals charged with undermining the authority of or insulting the President. These individuals were charged with making comments or statements which were deemed to be undermining the authority of or insulting the President. In most of the cases individuals were charged and brought before the courts regardless of where or to whom the alleged statements were made. In the period individuals charged included a Member of Parliament, a Cabinet Minister, a war veteran and a visual artist.

According to (Section 61 {1}) of the Constitution, citizens have the right to freedom of expression which includes the freedom to seek, receive and communicate ideas and other information. Citizens therefore have the right to voice their opinions freely, without fear of reprisals or having their rights violated by those who are not in agreement with the expressed opinions. Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right which underpins most other rights and allows them to flourish. The right to speak one's mind freely on important issues in society, and hold duty bearers to account, plays a pivotal role in the development of any country.

Zimbabwe Peace Project is a non partisan Non Governmental Organisation which seeks to advance sustainable peace through community based monitoring and documenting of breaches of peace. ZPP works through a strong network of monitors in all electoral constituencies who by deployment cast the net wider.

Ends

Advancing Sustainable Peace in Zimbabwe

FOR COMMENTS AND FURTHER DETAILS CONTACT

Zimbabwe Peace Project

ZPP Chairperson: +263 77 259 5398

ZPP National Director: +263 77 227 6543

+263 (04) 747719, 2930180/2

zppinfo@gmail.com, zppinfo@myzpp.com or website: www.zimpeaceproject.com

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