

Police ban radios

Police in Zimbabwe have announced a ban on the possession of shortwave radio receivers, saying they are being used to communicate hate speech ahead of next month's constitutional referendum and elections set to be held in July.

Wind-up, solar-powered radios sets have been distributed by some NGOs to rural communities, where villagers have established listening clubs to tune in to popular independent radio stations like Radio Voice of The People, Studio 7 and SW Radio Africa. The broadcasts are produced by exiled Zimbabwean journalists based in Europe and the US.

Zimbabwe has four state-controlled radio stations with a history of supporting president Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF party. Two recently established independent radio stations are also perceived to be pro-ZANU-PF. There is demand among listeners, especially those supportive of the rival Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), for other viewpoints.

Ban criticised

In the last elections, in 2008, many rural constituencies with access to independent radio broadcasts voted for the MDC formations led by professor Welshman Ncube and prime minister Morgan Tsvangirai.

The Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ) - a group comprising the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists, the Zimbabwe National Editors Forum, the Federation of African Media Women of Zimbabwe and other groups advocating for freedom of expression - has condemned the ban on radio receivers.

In a statement, MAZ noted that "owning and distributing radio receivers is not illegal and that confiscating them is a gross violation of citizens' rights to receive and impart ideas and information without interference, as enshrined in Section 20 of the Constitution."

Urging the police to reverse the ban, MAZ pointed out that it would deprive people of an important source of information ahead of two critical national events.

Source: [allafrica](http://allafrica.com)