

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND EXPRESSION AT RISK AS GOVERNMENT SUSPENDS PRIME TELEVISION BROADCASTING LICENSE

ActionAid Zambia is deeply concerned with the draconian decision by the Zambian Government to suspend the broadcasting license of the privately owned Prime Television.

The Patriotic Front (PF) Government through the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA,) on Thursday, 9th April 2020, suspended the broadcasting license of Prime television under the guise of public interest.

The decision by the Zambian government to cancel the broadcasting license of Prime Television is unconstitutional as it violates the constitutional provisions in Articles 20 and 21 on fundamental freedoms of the press and expression. It is abundantly clear that Government has taken an despotic disposition in trying to cull and intimidate the media.

We are particularly concerned with the way this particular regime has over the years closed down independent media institutions. It can be recalled that in a similar fashion a vibrant media house - The Post Newspaper, was closed down using the Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA).

The role of the media, particularly private independent media houses, cannot be overemphasized. Prime Television has been the voice of the voiceless and it has been playing an important role in educating, informing and entertaining the masses.

The public interest excuse is indeed laughable as it is clear that Government has been looking for an opportunity to close down the Television station at all costs. ActionAid Zambia would like to caution the PF Government to refrain from harassing and intimidating media houses using public institutions.

ActionAid Zambia has also noted the systematic victimization of citizens and institutions that seem to be speaking for the masses.

It is difficult to understand how a government that has emphasized on the creation of jobs could be closing an institution that employs many people, who are mostly young people. It is sad to note that while government is failing to create employment opportunities, it is in the forefront, killing citizen initiatives that are creating employment opportunities and empowering the youth.

We would like to call upon the Government to immediately rescind its decision and reopen Prime Television. Zambians should stand up and stop this dictatorship in the making before it is too late.

Nalucha Nganga Ziba

Country Director, ActionAid Zambia