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Zimbabwe: Government's closure of independent newspaper gags press freedom

By shutting down the *Daily News* newspaper, the Zimbabwean government has demonstrated yet again that the Zimbabwean authorities are intent on silencing dissent and denying Zimbabweans their fundamental right to freely express themselves, Amnesty International said today.

On 12 September police entered *Daily News* offices in Harare, requested all staff to leave and ordered the closure of the offices. The editor, Nqobile Nyathi, and the operations manager, Simon Ngena, were arrested and later released without charge.

The closure of the *Daily News* came one day after Zimbabwe's Supreme Court ruled that the newspaper was "illegal" because of its refusal to register with the state-controlled Media and Information Commission (MIC), a requirement under Section 66 of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA). The court issued its ruling after the *Daily News* challenged Section 66, arguing that such a requirement was unconstitutional.

"This latest action by the Zimbabwean government sends a strong and clear signal to regional and international leaders that human rights are under siege in Zimbabwe. Sustained public condemnation of the repression of fundamental rights in Zimbabwe is not an option but a must", Amnesty International concluded.

Background

The *Daily News* has been the target of several verbal attacks by government officials, and its offices have been petrol-bombed three times since it was founded in 1999.

AIPPA, enacted in March 2002, restricts access to information held by public bodies; establishes a government controlled Media and Information Commission which regulates the independent media; requires the accreditation of journalists and media houses; and criminalizes defamation.

In its report, *Zimbabwe: Rights under Siege* (AFR 46/012/2003) Amnesty International documents how the Zimbabwean authorities are using restrictive legislation such as AIPPA to repress internationally-recognized rights and freedoms, including the right to freedom of expression.

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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