

Two Zimbabwean Journalists arrested for “contravening electoral regulations”.

Campaign for Free Expression is concerned about the arrests of Alpha Media Holdings (AMH) journalists Blessed Mhlanga and Chengeto Chidi who appeared in court on Monday, 9 May 2022.

Mhlanga and Chidi were granted bail on charges of contravening electoral regulations or disorderly conduct in a polling station.

They are accused of contravening a law prohibiting photography in the polling station.

Mhlanga Tweeted that they had been charged with taking pictures 60m away from a polling station without authority.

According to news reports, the state alleges that on 7 May 2022, one or both of them took photographs or recorded a video within polling station tent B of the Chitungwiza Ward 7 Council by-elections without the permission of the Constituency Elections Officer.

Mhlanga and Chidi are also accused of disorderly conduct in the immediate vicinity of a polling station by allegedly refusing to comply with an order given by Superintendent Kufakunesu Matsika not to take pictures or video recording at the polling station.

In a series of Tweets, Mhlangu said he is a fully accredited journalist with 2022 accreditation card used by Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) a constitutional body that accredits journalists.

“The production of my accreditation did not even matter to the police. I appear in court today. I and Chidi are not criminals,” he added.

The two journalists were in Chitungwiza working on a story on water issues in the dormitory town.

They were interviewing residents at a borehole when they observed the police attempting to arrest Job Sikhala, the local legislator for St Mary's constituency, and they started recording the incident. It is alleged that the police then pounced on them and one of them assaulted Mhlanga and smashed his mobile phone on the ground.

Police seized the journalists' phones and cameras.

They were each granted \$20, 000 bail each and ordered to report once every fortnight to police. Their trial has been set for 24 May 2022.

CFE calls on the Zimbabwean authorities to respect the constitutional rights of journalists. Journalism is not a crime and journalists doing their jobs should not be treated as criminals.

Zimbabwe declined on the Reporters Without Borders (RSF)'s [2022 World Press Freedom Index](#). In 2021, Zimbabwe was ranked 130th and in 2022 it was ranked 137th.

*The Campaign for Free Expression (CFE) is a non-profit organisation dedicated to protecting and expanding the right to free expression for ALL, and enabling EVERYONE to exercise this right to the full, whether it by speaking out, by protesting, by revealing information, by blowing the whistle on wrong-doing, by arguing, debating, writing, painting, composing or just by shouting out an opinion.

More information is available at: <https://freeexpression.org.za/>

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