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First They Censored the Letters, Then the Internet, and Now, Cellphones

By Nancy Reyes

Yesterday I wrote about how certain progressive organizations used purple prose to exaggerate what happened in Haiti, and commented that they were making things worse when they painted thugs who used politics as an excuse for their gangsterism as human rights martyrs.

The “flip” side of the picture can be seen in Zimbabwe, where outside reporters are often not allowed inside to investigate that country, outside NGO’s are limited in access even when delivering needed humanitarian supplies, local newspapers are shut down, reporters censored, and ordinary people are afraid to write about the problems they face because the mail and emails are monitored by the government.

Zimbabwe is trying to stop NGO’s, churches, reporters and others from doing reporting of the deteriorating economic situation in that country, where the UN estimates half of the 12 million population are facing a food shortage and a shortage of basic supplies due to a lack of currency to pay their bills.

Yet Zimbabwe has enough money to purchase an Internet monitoring system from China to censor the fledgling Internet in that country. The next step: Cellphones

The latest effort to plug holes in reporting the situation is the attempt of the government to intercept cellphone calls, which the Zimbabwean army calls a national security risk.

““We want to listen, to make sure the nation is safe. If we liberalize the gateways then it means there would be a group of people who would communicate without our knowledge,” Chineka was quoted as saying by the government-controlled daily Mirror...”

But unlike net censorship or US/EU snooping into groups whose open aim is violent terror against civilians, the censorship in Zimbabwe is aimed at preventing the bad news from getting out.

And the news that comes out is increasingly bad in a country that is going from bad to worse to even more destitute not due to war or natural disaster, but from deliberate government mismanagement and neglect, according to Archbishop Ncube of Bulawayo, who is in London raising money for HIV treatment.

And, indeed, to those of us following the news, the situation is indeed grim. The best workers

have already left the country legally or illegally, many going to South Africa. The poor harvests continue, partly due to drought, lack of fertilizer and irrigation and the emigration of the loss of skilled farmers (both black and white), but mostly due to the fact that under the guise of “land reform”, the government has confiscated the large white farms that produced much of the food consumed by urban dwellers, and instead of giving the farms to the workers and compensating the farmers, as was done here in the Philippines, the workers were often chased off and the farms awarded to the cronies of the president...men who knew little and cared less on how to properly run a large farming operation.

As a result, Zimbabwe, which for years had exported grain and other agricultural commodities, is now forced to import food, much of it from international donors, since the economy is in collapse and the government has trouble paying their debts.

The situation is deteriorating; the VOA reports that the United Nations Deputy Secretary General Mark Malloch Brown is worried about the deteriorating situation in that country, and implied he would like the international community to intervene to help prevent the humanitarian crisis and lack of food and essential supplies, and also notes the deteriorating human rights situation.

Walter Mzembi, a ZANU-PF parliamentarian at the meeting, said Brown was misled by biased reporting.

You see, as long as the government can deny the famine and economic problems, they can pretend everything is fine. Hence the increased attempt to stop negative news reports from filtering out of that country.

Sokwanele, a local human rights group, reports not only is the local Zimbabwean press censored, but the South African press has apparently blacklisted certain Zimbabwean reporters and commentators who oppose the government, including Archbishop Ncube.

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