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Zambia Requested to Stop Blocking Access to Websites

Published July 25, 2013 By [Editor](#)

The following is the full text of a letter sent by the editorial board Zambia Reports to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services with regard to the recent blocking of access to news websites.

Dear Sirs,

We humbly direct ourselves toward your offices at the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services of the Government of Zambia to register our concern over the limited access to news website, Zambia Reports (<http://zambiareports.com/>), for Internet users inside Zambia.



We first observed a partial interruption of service on July 16, which in the following days worsened, creating a complete block on our IP Address (<http://50.63.32.1/>), denying Zambian citizens the opportunity to access the information and news that we publish on a daily basis. This blockage occurred at the same time that another news website, *Zambian Watchdog*, also experienced a service interruption inside Zambia, which was detailed in an announcement by the New York-based press freedom NGO Committee to Protect Journalists (see article: <http://cpj.org/2013/07/in-zambia-harassment-of-watchdog-site-continues.php>).

To date, Zambia Reports has received no information from the government explaining why access has been blocked. From the inception of our publication in March 2012, there has been only one incident in which a member of government contacted our editorial board with a take-down request, and, although we were not legally required to remove the disputed content, we nevertheless complied and removed the disputed article in good faith. Zambia Reports has received no other form of complaint, request, or notice of violation from any representative of the Government of Zambia, nor any other official institution. To date, our website has never been formally accused or informed of any form of alleged libel, defamation, or any other unlawful nature of the news content published.

Given that the blocking of these IPs occurs within a challenging climate for journalism and freedom of expression, including the arrests of at least three reporters in recent weeks, some observers have suggested that the blocking of websites constitutes an act of censorship.

On February 23, 2013, the advocacy news website *Global Voices* (<http://advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/2013/02/23/zambia-chinese-experts-to-monitor-internet/>) published a report detailing efforts by the Zambian government to work with a team from the Government of China to install a secret Internet monitoring facility with the capability to block access to websites. The same report cited a notice from the Office of the President and the security services to mobile phone and internet service providers, obligating them to cooperate and grant access to security agents to their networks.

In light of these developments, the press freedom NGO *Reporters Without Borders* has provided Zambia Reports with a mirrored website (<http://zambiareports.rsf.org/>), which for the moment, can be accessed inside the country. We also are willing, if necessary, to move our IP to a number of other mirrors, as well as continue publishing our content to social media networks, such as Facebook. Our content is also syndicated with the international news organisation, *AllAfrica.com*, which has not yet been blocked inside Zambia. Zambia Reports has also filed a complaint regarding the blocking of our IP to the Zambia Information and Communication Technology Authority (ZICTA).

Freedom of the press and freedom from censorship is vital to a healthy democracy. We respectfully remind your esteemed Ministry that freedom of expression is guaranteed under Article 20 of the Zambian Constitution. The right to freedom of expression includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference; the freedom to receive ideas and information without interference; and the freedom to impact and communicate ideas and information without interference.

The blocking of access to our website in Zambia is a violation of our right to freedom of expression. Given that there has never been any complaint nor any notification of any violation of law, we view this online censorship as unlawful. Our business has additionally suffered pernicious damage due to decreased advertising revenue as the result of the unexplained decision to block access, which creates budgetary and

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planning challenges as a result of the state's intervention.

The Honourable Minister Sakeni has on various occasions promised to protect freedom of the press on behalf of the Patriotic Front government. In an official Ministry statement dated March 29, 2013 (<http://www.lusakatimes.com/2013/03/29/information-minister-kennedy-sakeni-releases-a-media-statement-attacking-mike-mulongoti/>), it was stated that "Under the PF Government, the media, both public and private, is now free to set its own reportorial and editorial agenda without fear or favour," emphasizing that the policy being pursued "demonstrates the PF Government's commitment to ensure free flow and public access to information, a pre-requisite for a thriving democracy."

The use of Chinese technology to engage in net censorship is not only unlawful under the Zambian constitution, it also deprives the Zambian people of their basic right to access diverse sources of media outside the state-controlled outlets and a single pro-government private newspaper. Furthermore, this censorship is damaging to Zambia's international image as a destination for foreign investment and aid.

Acknowledging that the blocking of these websites possibly was unsanctioned by the Ministry or otherwise perhaps represents some type of technical error, we humbly present before your esteemed offices three requests:

- 1) Provide a detailed explanation regarding the state's decision to block access to Zambia Reports, including instructions of the necessary steps required to resolve the issue.
- 2) Organise an internal inquiry into these cases of online news censorship for presentation before the National Assembly.
- 3) Immediately restore full access to Zambia Reports and any other blocked websites pending the outcome of the Ministry's internal inquiry.

A free and vibrant press represents an essential component of a successful democracy, and the Zambian Government's decision to reverse this ill-considered venture would be viewed as a welcome sign of its commitment to constitutionally guaranteed freedoms of expression and freedom of the press.

Sincerely,

The Editorial Board of Zambia Reports

editor@zambiareports.com

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pompwe

Posted July 26, 2013 at 8:54 am | [Permalink](#)

indeed..we need access freely..

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Fenwick

Posted July 29, 2013 at 4:58 pm | [Permalink](#)

Bali pena ba PF. They won't know what hit them if they block any dissenting views. Everything and everyone has a critic in this world because nobody is perfect. I would rather I knew what my critics are talking about, it would make me a better person.

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Posted August 1, 2013 at 11:23 am | [Permalink](#)

Wow, this piece of writing is pleasant, my sister is analyzing such things, therefore I am going to tell her.

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