

The Standard BEST SUNDAY READ @ 25

It's been an impactful journey, says Ncube



AMH chairman Trevor Ncube addresses guests at a breakfast meeting to celebrate The Standard@25 on Monday in Harare

BY PRIDE MUZARABANI

ALPHA Media Holdings (AMH) chairman Trevor Ncube has paid tribute to the independent media group's staff for playing a key role in ensuring that the vision to provide cutting edge journalism is realised.

Speaking at a breakfast meeting to celebrate the 25th anniversary of *The Standard* at the Rainbow Towers in Harare on May 23, Ncube said the tough journey had been made easier by competent staff.

"It's been a wonderful 25 years, an impactful 25 years. It's not been an easy journey but it's been made easier by the many amazing people we have worked with," he said.

"I want to honour God and thank our God for the grace, the provision, the cover and the protection and at times the wisdom throughout all the 25 years and we pray for more years and we commit our prayers to the Lord.

"It's been an amazing 25 years and it wouldn't be possible without the journalists.

"I want to pay particular tribute to the founding editor of *The Standard* Mark Chavunduka the late, who set the pace as far as being brave as well as standing up for independent journalism is concerned and that team who started the journey.

Zimbabwe's leading independent Sunday paper, *The Standard* first hit the streets in May 1997, which was a year after its sister paper the *Zimbabwe Independent* was set up.

The two leading publications are now part of AMH, which also publishes *NewsDay*, *Weekly Digest* and *Southern Eye*.

AMH are owners of *Heart & Soul Broadcasting Services*, which runs Zimbabwe's first teleradio.

Ncube said *The Standard* had since established itself as a newspaper of record on the Zimbabwean market.

"Thank you to (the editor) Kholwani (Nyathi) and his team, he has been with *The Standard* for 15 years and seven of those as the editor," he said.

"It's so great sitting out there and hearing about people who have been with Alpha Media Holdings for 18 or 25 years.

"I know there is a man who is not here Archbold Makoni, I think he has been with Alpha Media Holdings for 27 if not 28 years, so we have had a tradition of staff coming in and staying with us for a very long time and we are grateful for that.

"Thank you to Punish (Murumbi), Wilson (Masawa) and the entire advertising department. The publication wouldn't be what it is without your amazing work."

The AMH chairman said last week's event was the beginning of a year of celebrations for *The Standard*.

He thanked advertisers, subscribers and readers for standing with the publication throughout a 'turbulent journey.'

"Thank you so much to advertisers who are in here and those who are not in here, your support to our print edition, electronic edition and all other platforms is greatly appreciated," Ncube said.

"Thank you to our readers who supported us from day one and continue to support us, marketing department, distribution department, the guys that sell subscriptions and vendors."

Information minister Monica Mutsvangwa said *The Standard* had established itself as "a very rich read."

"For sure *The Standard* newspaper has built itself brick by brick for over 25 years," Mutsvangwa said in a speech read on her behalf by John Gandari, chief director in the Ministry of



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CONTINUED ON S14

25 years of 'bold and independent journalism'



AMH editor-in-chief Wisdom Mdzungairi

BY WISDOM MDZUNGAIRI

ZIMBABWE'S leading Sunday family newspaper, *The Standard*, is celebrating its 25th anniversary this month, at a time the paper has strengthened its position on the market with improved independent and bold journalism.

This paper, part of the Alpha Media Holdings (AMH) stable that also publishes household news titles, *NewsDay*, *Zimbabwe Independent*, *Southern Eye* and digital offering *Weekly Digest*, first hit the streets in May 1997.

Over the years, *The Standard* has consolidated its position as a family newspaper never to be missed every Sunday. So for us, the month reminds us of the milestones we have achieved over the past 25 years.

I pay tribute to the editorial team for their unparalleled commitment and ded-

ication to tell the unadulterated Zimbabwean story during an extremely difficult period.

The Standard has fronted groundbreaking journalism in the country, becoming a major revenue stream for the business and a vital component for the country's democracy.

For 25 years since *The Standard* hit the streets, quickly breaking new ground in local news reporting — the country's largest independent weekend paper has been daring, innovative and breaking barriers.

I want to pay tribute to current editor Kholwani Nyathi for remaining true to the AMH Pledge, the founding editor of *The Standard*, the late Mark Chavunduka, whose arrest and torture in 1999, together with then senior reporter Ray Choto, cannot be ignored. Kudos also go to other former editors and journalists Andy Moyse, the late Bornwell Chaka-

odza, Davison Maruziva, Walter Marwizi and Nevanji Madanhire, who all at different episodes led this paper. Their contribution is greatly appreciated.

We celebrate *The Standard* silver jubilee, at a time AMH is in the middle of a change process. We're not even half the change we desire. But, this is a vital moment in the life of the business. Most important, the business is uniquely well positioned to take advantage of today's changing media landscape.

These changes will not alter the basic principles that, from now, will guide AMH's fully converged news operation:

Our aim is a clear one: to be the market leaders — in Zimbabwe and in Africa. This can only be achieved if we offer the best range of content needed to satisfy both consumers and advertisers, giving equal attention to every platform that we serve.

Only AMH has the legacy, independence, the commitment to ethical journalism, and the drive to innovate. So these vital values cannot be wasted.

We are committed to our digital and print editions for as long as our audiences, subscribers and advertisers continue to support it. Nevertheless, while we take justifiable pride in the speed of our digital transformation over the past few years, the pandemic has rammed home the lesson that the transformation will have to be even quicker.

Our newspapers and online sites are there to offer a canvas for Zimbabweans to showcase their best ideas to help transform the country into a knowledge-based society where citizens are free to express their creativity, ingenuity and entrepreneurship. We have set ourselves challenging objectives, but we believe that only by striving to achieve the highest can we elevate ourselves above the elements which tend to hold the country back.

Thus, whatever the platform on which you consume our journalism, know this — we are, and always will be, committed to provide news you can use and being the voice of this young country in transition.

It is our desire to create a conversation with Zimbabweans about the issues that matter in the country and enable maximum participation so that our newspapers and digital offerings reflect as diverse a range of perspectives as possible. In so doing, we hope to be part of the process of national healing, nation building, reconciliation and reconstruction.

As editor-in-chief, I cannot but be proud of, and thankful for, the excellent work my colleagues (past and present) are carrying out in these challenging times.

We plan to expand further afield. The best is yet to come!

• Mdzungairi is AMH editor-in-chief

It's been an impactful journey: Ncube

CONTINUED FROM S13

Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services. "I know that you are a Sunday newspaper and as such you are a family newspaper which combines business, entertainment, sports, political reportage and other news genres.

"This makes you a very rich read."

The minister added: "Ladies and gentlemen research and testimonials from experienced and seasoned members of the media fraternity inform us that this jubilee is happening at a time when the media environment in Zimbabwe is a bit more relaxed, a bit more exciting.

"The Berlin walls are falling and the practice is becoming more exciting.

"The second republic under the leadership of his Excellency the president Dr ED Mnangagwa has ushered in a new media environment, which has seen an increase in media players and hopefully with the increase of the new media players the diversity and spread of the media will also improve."

Congratulations

Janet Manyowa Music would like to congratulate The Standard Newspaper on their 25th Anniversary. May the journey of corporate success continue even in the coming years! Wishing you and your team a #Wanqoba Anniversary!

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25 years of giving voice to the voiceless



The editor of *The Standard* Kholwani Nyathi

BY KHOLWANI NYATHI

JOURNALISM plays a critical role in any democratic society where the media is allowed to operate without undue influence from governments and corporates.

An independent media will uncover truth, hold power to account and give a platform to citizens to talk to each other without fear or favour.

Twenty five years ago this month *The Standard* first hit the streets with the bold promise to ensure that journalism in Zimbabwe becomes the lifeblood of democracy.

As we celebrate our silver jubilee this year, we are convinced that we have been playing a critical role in keeping the country's nascent democracy alive despite the well documented obstacles.

In Zimbabwe, like many parts of the world, independent journalism faces an existential crisis.

The powerful elite are seeking to manipulate and silence critical media on an unprecedented scale.

It has been a tough journey for *The Standard* since 1997 through economic crises, political turbulences and shifting news consumption patterns, yet we have stayed true to our promise.

We have been digging where others don't, giving voice to the voiceless, shining light in dark places, scrutinising and holding the powerful to account on behalf of our audiences.

More than ever before Zimbabwe needs independent journalism to push back forces that look determined to return the country to the dark days of authoritarianism.

The scourge of corruption has become the biggest threat to the majority's livelihoods.

In the last five years this publication has followed a deliberate strategy to equip its journalists with investigative journalism skills and it is not by accident that it is emerging as a leader in that regard.

From exposing the looting at a grand scale through command agriculture to lifting the lid on the stripping of assets of parastatals such as Ziscosteel, *The Standard* has produced investigative journalism that is giving Zimbabweans the ammunition to bring their leaders to account.

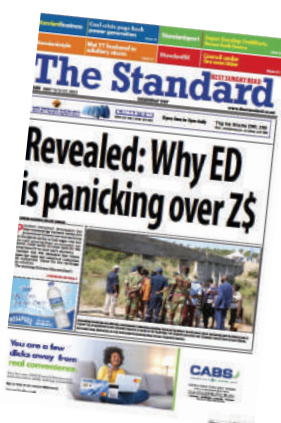
Investigative journalism will be the cornerstone of our work as we traverse the next 25 years ago.

A lot has changed since the first edition of *The Standard* in 1997 as our content was only available through the print edition and website.

We now deliver our cutting edge content via an e-paper that is sent to subscribers every Sunday, a more interactive website and through social media platforms such as *Twitter*, *Facebook* and *Instagram*.

It is against this background that we look to the future with optimism and renewed determination to be the leading publication in Zimbabwe.

● Nyathi is editor of *The Standard*



Setting **The Standard** for media partnership

Where others show fear, you show courage!

Zimbabwe's media space has been less than favourable to 'different' opinions and topics considered taboo. The media should ideally be factual, objective, impartial and a friend to the truth. It takes courage to be able to write about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people without being unnecessarily salacious or reinforcing negative stereotypes.

In the face of tests, constant unstable

economic conditions, difficult resource chains, possible censorship and content controls, you have remained an open space for the visibility of marginalized communities.

We hope to continue the relationship, allowing conversations around human rights to continue, building safer and more inclusive media spaces, training and empowering journalists to be ethical citizens and ensuring our democracy strives for the principle of ubuntu.

Here's to you!

Congratulations!



Standard Deputy Editor
Tangai Chipangura

Being part of a vibrant Standard team

BY TANGAI CHIPANGURA

THERE can never be a better way to own a piece of history than being part of a newspaper from the actual date it was printed. The emotional attachment can only be understood through experience.

I have kept a copy of the first edition of *NewsDay* — not some photocopy or reproduction, but the real thing that I have kept in my archives where it stays safe and untouched, complete with that distinctive smell and the unmistakable feel of an old newspaper!

That unique experience has indeed etched an indelible mark in my professional life, and I believed there could never be a more fulfilling work experience until, by some insane quirk of fate, I found myself at *The Standard* in 2015.

Coming from the spacious and loud newsroom at *NewsDay*, *The Standard* was such a small and quiet family my initial feeling was that I was going to be bored to death. But no, besides the relief of having escaped daily long hours at the daily paper, that small family at *The Standard* was such a bundle of joy.

I joined *The Standard* as deputy editor and some of the guys I found there included the then editor Walter Marwizi, Caiphaz Chimhete, Patrice Makova, Conelia Mabasa, Moses Mugunyeki, Chipo Masara and Brian Nkiwane. The team was so close that diary meetings, which by the way became twice weekly rather than twice daily, assumed a totally different dimension. Each story idea is dissected to the bone and if it survives the spike, goes through thorough examination where holes are plugged before it sees light of day on Sunday.

The transition from a daily to the weekly *Standard* was really not much of a challenge for me I must say. I was in familiar territory, thanks to my earlier dalliance with the monthly *Parade* magazine where I had been during the first 12 years of my career.

My arrival at *The Standard*, however, marked the beginning of a new era at the newspaper, so to speak, as stewardship changed. The editor, Nevanji Madanire had just moved from *The Standard* to become editor of *NewsDay*, leaving Marwizi in charge. Marwizi brought with him new ideas to the paper, which we helped shape as we embarked on a new trajectory.

The Standard family, including the marketing component of staff has remained largely intact over the years save for a few movements, including that of the editor, Marwizi who left during the retrenchment wave that swept through the country in 2017. He was replaced by Kholwani Nyathi, who had been with the paper several years earlier before leaving for a brief flirtation with *NewsDay* and *Southern Eye*.

As technology moved to disrupt the “business as usual” mantra everywhere around the world, newsrooms were not spared and our own quiet, neat, and close little family at *The Standard* was thrown into inevitable “disarray”. It took time and several eye-opener meetings to get newsrooms to assimilate the new communication world order.

So, *The Standard* team under the current leadership of Nyathi, with a converged mindset, set out to reap the most out of this technological new order and we continue to navigate the ever-changing media environment with “best product and big profit” in mind. The result has been to propel *The Standard* to the top. We are now arguably the most popular Sunday newspaper in Zimbabwe.



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Prospects for growth in an unstable market

BY NIGEL NYAMUTUMBU

IT is often argued that experience is the best teacher. This assertion, however, may not necessarily ring true when critically reflecting on the future of print media. Even for those that have stood the test of time as did *The Standard*, Zimbabwe's best Sunday read — to borrow from its tagline, which reached the silver jubilee milestone this month.

That the paper remains not only alive but competing speaks volumes of its pedigree, particularly when you examine the context in which the paper operates. Zimbabwe's hostile political environment needs no introduction to any discerning reader or audience of this family paper.

Working in the independent media, private if you like or what has lately been defined as critical media is certainly no stroll in the park. It comes with an assortment of risks, especially when power, in all its manifestations is threatened.

The techniques of exerting power in a bid to silence dissenting voices or to eclipse the truth are varied and have been evolving over time.

From arbitrary arrests, assaults, verbal threats to sexual harassment, there are various physical threats that journalists and media workers have had to contend with in defence of an otherwise thankless enterprise of defending democracy and for every story to be heard.

Add to that a repressive legislative environment that is unfriendly to the practise of journalism, with statutes upon statutes seeking to control as opposed to regulate the news and information society. The effect of which being the use of the law as a weapon, consciously and/or subconsciously wherein you entrench a culture of self-censorship.

The threats have been moving with the times. In as much as a significant portion of our lives have moved to the online space, so have the attacks on free media enterprise. In what the United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) has described as "digital siege" or "journalism under surveillance" as the main theme for this year's World Press Freedom Day commemorations, independent journalism continues to encounter threats, some which are of an existential nature.

Cyber-bullying, particularly on social media where trolling has become the order of the day is one example. The truth has been the biggest casualty as online traffic has been designed deliberately by way of algorithms or by malice or sheer ignorance. The debates on social media are thereby becoming uninformed and certainly uneducated. Perhaps the only remaining function of the media has been that of entertaining.

More worrying has been the investment in surveillance tools by states, such as Zimbabwe, which is reportedly among those that have procured these gadgets, which naturally compromises the privacy of journalists communication and the sourcing of information thereof. Unethical hacking, use of parody accounts and misrepresentations online are also affecting the trade and work of journalists.

Beyond the online and offline threats to independent journalism, is the decaying economy. The economic environment has a two-pronged effect on media outlets such as *The Standard* that has no guarantor of repute or of the magnitude of the state.

On one hand, sales and circulation, the very essence and first stream of revenue for a print media outlet decline due to competing livelihood interests. The decision on whether to buy bread or a newspaper, never mind the quality of either is a no brainer. By the same measure, the first budget to be streamlined by businesses, without even thinking twice is the media, advertising and public relations budget.

What makes the case of *The Standard* and other actors in the sector even worse is the hyper inflationary environment that the country's economy operates in. You basically cannot plan. The projections that are put in place and the market value when payment is made makes a mockery of any business, never mind the print sector that is already crippled.

Skills retention becomes near impossible and thus compromising the quality of the product that should concern us all — news media. Media is a viable sector, which the late former South African president Nelson Mandela termed the lifeblood of democracy. This is why its sustainability should not be a question for the proprietor but for everyone, particularly those that swear by our constitution.

That we haven't heard of any tax breaks for the media sector or any public policy pronouncements that seek to inject life to our democracy through supporting the media is not only shocking, but deplorable. It is the business of government to cre-

ate a conducive environment for the media and even providing advertisers with incentives for supporting the media sector. What we currently have are acknowledgements of the crisis and paying lip service to the existential threats confronting the media.

I digress though to take a quick peep on what *The Standard* and our print media needs to sustain operations under this environment.

Firstly, innovation. The print media should evolve beyond past experiences. Yes newsroom structures can be maintained and quality content remaining the hallmark of news media. But the presentation has to change. The audiences are evolving and so should the paper. The idea of a talking paper is interesting yet it can be developed further so as to monetise such interventions.

Secondly, there is need to escalate convergence. But this convergence has to be hinged on making the print side of

business survive. What the more discerning audience miss in the fast paced social media and broadcasting world should be ably satisfied in the print edition. This means focussing more on in-depth news, series, and features all anchored on investigative journalism. Stories that scratch the surface or are event based should be used in other platforms to make that distinction.

Third and lastly, at least for this instalment, specialised journalism and partnerships. This speaks to an investment in skills to infuse specialized beats that include graphic and data journalism among others. There is need not to depend on experience per se but on being a learning institution.

That can only happen if there is investment in upgrading skills and in forging partnerships, some of which could break transnational stories. There is always demand for stories in which journalists collaborate across borders to de-

fine what could be the regional or global agenda.

This way, the audiences can also be widespread beyond the usual market that has carried *The Standard* through in all these years.

The future of print media is now. Surely, as accounted in this piece, *The Standard* has operated in an environment where journalism cannot thrive. Yet today we reflect on 25 years in the game for the very same media house that has seen this all. And survived.

Happy silver jubilee, *The Standard*. Wishing you many more years of quality journalism!

● **Nigel Nyamutumbu is a media development practitioner, currently heading the secretariat of a network of media professional associations and media support organisations, the Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ). He can be contacted on +263 772 501 557 or njnya2@gmail.com**


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Together we are holding power to account through investigative journalism



BY TAWANDA MAJONI

THERE are numerous curious facts—and myths, of course—that come with the number 25.

In history and religion, number 25 was associated with milestone events. For instance, Christians have been celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ on December 25 for centuries. That is a hallowed date on the modern Julian calendar.

In the Koran, 25 prophets appear and pass on the word of Mohammed. In a cou-

ple of countries, the maximum jail sentence you can get is 25 years.

One clairvoyant says about the number 25: “This number contains symbolism that represents relationships, personal freedom and companionship”.

The Standard has just turned 25. It hit the streets in 1997 and easily became one of Zimbabwe’s leading weekly news publications. It remains one of the leading weeklies in Zimbabwe, and there are many people out there who are persuaded that it is actually the leading weekly.

The number 25 for *The Standard* represents an awesome eon of public service. Sociologists define a generation as a period spanning 20 years or so. *The Standard* is older than a generation. Millions were born during the period that the newspaper has been in existence. Thousands have died, too. Many have married and now have families; others are on the verge of starting their own families and everyone who was born when *The Standard* had just started is, without argument, an adult now.

That means the publication has a big history. For more than a generation, it has informed, educated and entertained millions of people, and it does not seem to be holding any grudge against time.

On one cloudy day in late February 2017, Information for Development Trust (IDT) entered into a publishing partnership with *The Standard*. The paper’s editor, Kholwani Nyathi—who has been with the paper for an amazing 15 years—agreed to run investigative content commissioned by IDT, a non-profit media outfit which had just been established. That was the beginning of a joint assignment that is five years old now.

It was an exciting publishing partnership built on mutual ambition. There was no doubt that Zimbabwe needed—and still needs—well-researched, probing, fact-checked and professionally produced investigative content as a way of holding power to account.

There were efforts elsewhere, of course, associated with investigative reporting. But, through our partnership, we dreamt to use a slightly different model. As a non-profit organisation, the IDT approach entails equipping journalists and media houses with resources—modest though even at this stage—with capacity-building resources so that they can produce prying content that is essential to inform the public domain and empower its citizens to make informed decisions.

The overarching problem is that newsrooms and freelance journalists are generally constrained to produce investigative content. The newsrooms are depleted. Experienced journalists have left, either into retirement or for greener pastures. The lean staff complements, therefore, cannot devote enough time to do investigative reporting, which, by nature, requires money, effort and time.

The media has not been spared the decades-long economic crisis. Advertising has shrunk. Salaries are poor. Newsroom morale is low. This is an era where publishers are being forced to mostly rely on young journalists who still have a lot to learn. But investigative journalism requires certain basic skills, and is happier with experienced journalists. *The Standard* was a typical example of the Zimbabwean newsroom burdened by the economic and financial crises prevailing since the turn of the millennium.

So, here is where non-profit support like the one that IDT has been providing becomes handy. The painful fact is that, when IDT sought *The Standard* out, the paper and its sister publications under Alpha Media Holdings (AMH) had so much talent in the respective newsrooms. But, as Kholwani pointed out at the beginning, they needed motivation and systematic support. There was so much to write about at the investigative level and the reporters were up to the call.

CONTINUED ON PAGE S17



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Congratulations Makorokoto Amhlophe.

Holding power to account through investigative journalism



Investigative journalists and trainers at one of the Information for Development Trust organised training sessions

CONTINUED FROM PAGE S16

The five-year stretch that we have travelled together so far has been fulfilling. It is based on mutual respect, a shared vision and effortless ambition. Our collaborations to date are pinned on a number of programming pillars.

We have conducted numerous training seminars together over the years. IDT has taken advantage of Kholwani's experience and expertise to rope him in as a trainer and mentor. Sometimes, that has come at no charge. Naturally, most of the journalists we have commissioned to produce investigative content have come from *The Standard* and AMH. All of them are talented, dedicated, young and very eager to learn new things at every available turn.

Over the years, we have managed to build such a strong rapport with the editor and his team, so much so that, even when there is no money to fund their investigative pitches, they volunteer to participate in free partnerships. They are happy to be associated with IDT, precisely because of the professional and honest approach that has always been the hallmark of our partnership.

Along the way, we have managed to produce content that has generated evident impact. There are numerous examples to reference, but just a couple will do in this space. We ran a series of investigative stories that exposed how the ruling elite and its cronies were manoeuvring to strip ZiscoSteel, a strategic public entity, of its assets. After this spirited expose, government stopped the vultures. Unfortunately, the ZiscoSteel board chair was subsequently chucked out. He had given candid interviews to *The Standard*, a pretty rare gesture in a country burdened by deep-running opacity.

Just as we were struggling to adjust to the horrors of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, *The Standard*, working in collaboration with IDT, produced another series of stories that exposed how government was bungling its response to the pandemic.

We also exposed how influential public officials and state-owned enterprises were corruptly taking advantage of the opportunities presented by Covid-19 for self-gain. That forced government to change its approach immediately.

In another instance, we ran a detailed series on how politicians and politically exposed persons, mainly linked to the ruling party, were sponsoring machete militias who were wreaking havoc in the gold mining sub-sector. Hardly a month after, government made a decisive clampdown on the merchants of violence that was threatening to turn into civil unrest.

Some of the stories we produced resulted in the arrest and prosecution of named culprits.

In this collaboration between *The Standard* and IDT, we feel that the day when we will tell the really compelling story is still to come. We remain ambitious. We have realised that the best way to tell the compelling investigative story is by responding to the needs and tastes of a fast-changing audience that is now captured by the digital bug.

In this regard, we are increasingly turning to tech-savvy and young journalists and grooming them—from our little corner—to tell the story using video, visuals, audios and data. We have no doubt these young journalists are the future of journalism.

● Tawanda Majoni is the national coordinator at Information for Development Trust (IDT)

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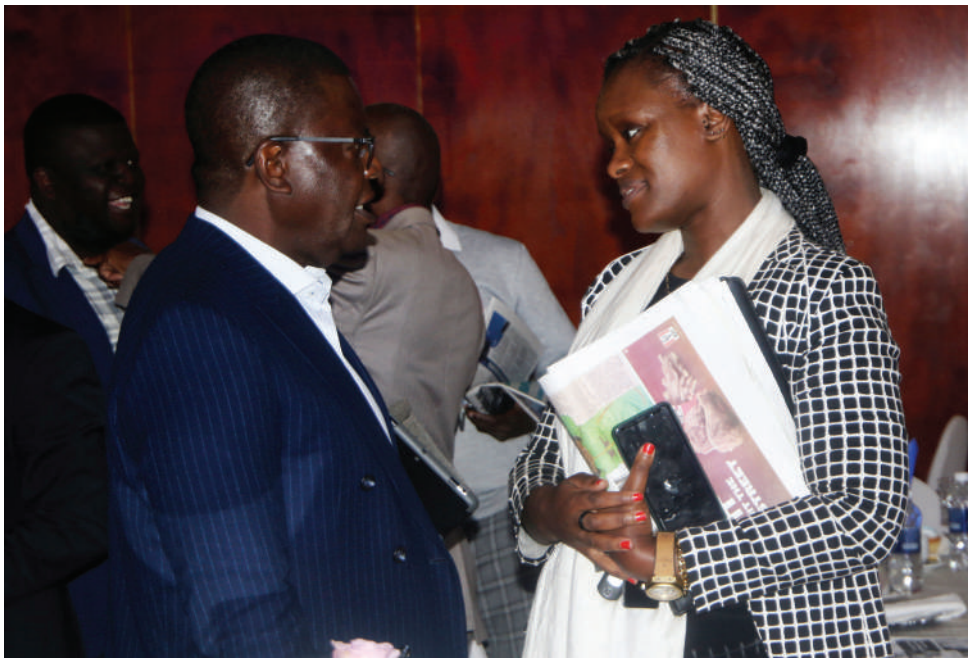
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The Standard @25 in pictures



The Standard @25 in pictures



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Assistant editor Patrice Makova



Chief sub-editor Conelia Mabasa

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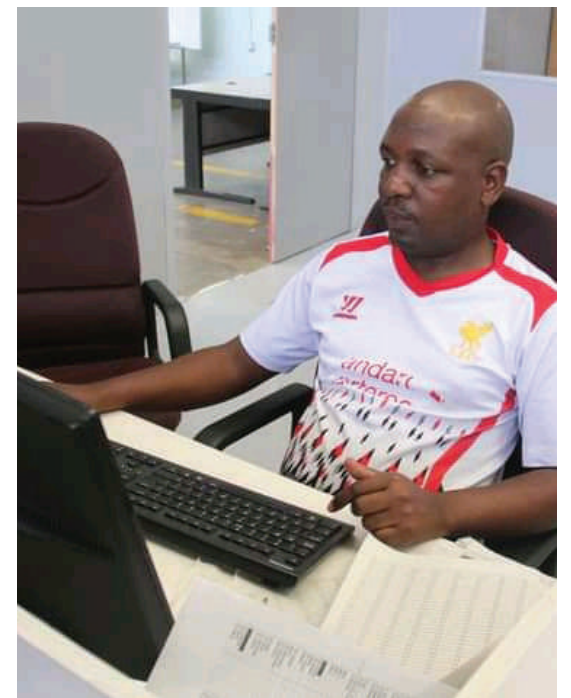


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Reflections from a former editor

BY ANDY MOYSE

CONGRATULATIONS to all those who serve and have served on a brave, independent newspaper.

You will need all the strength of those 25 years of experience to counter the government-controlled media's misinformation and manipulation of the truth in this upcoming election, which today — and yesterday — we always said was “the one that will make the change”.

I was editor between 1999 and 2000.

And on the paper's 10th anniversary I had the honour of being invited to speak at that event.

May I subject you to resurrecting the talk I gave that day: April 13th 2007 (just before the 2008 election).

For those who don't remember - or were just too young - we have been battling injustice, impunity, corruption and repression for more than a quarter of a century!

Here is what I had to say 15 years ago - it's *deja vu*:

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and friends....

It is indeed a great honour for me to be invited here to share your 10th birthday celebrations with you today.

It has certainly been a most eventful 10 years and I am proud that I have played a small part in the paper's illustrious record as a beacon of independent thought in Zimbabwe — indeed one of the very few independent newspapers that remain as a vital source of accurate information in Zimbabwe's blighted media landscape.

Since my brief tenure as the Standard's caretaker editor, the country's democratic space has collapsed and the media community has shrunk to a pitiable size that we never imagined possible at that time.

In those days — in the weeks and months leading up to the 2000 presidential and parliamentary elections — the birth of The Daily News the previous year and a variety of other media initiatives provided a challenge to the weekly press, but also gave us hope that a vibrant media community was still possible in Zimbabwe — despite the government's monopoly of the airwaves.

We were still a small community serving the needs of a big nation hungry for information and there was room for all of us.

Perhaps even because of ZBC's monopoly and the government's control over the traditional dailies, the independent press became an ever more important source of information for Zimbabweans desperate for an alternative to government's unrelenting propaganda.

The printed word was, at that time, the main source of information — and remains even more so to this day.

In fact, for ordinary Zimbabweans, the Independent group of newspapers is now virtually the only source of reliable information available to them about what is going on in Zimbabwe today.

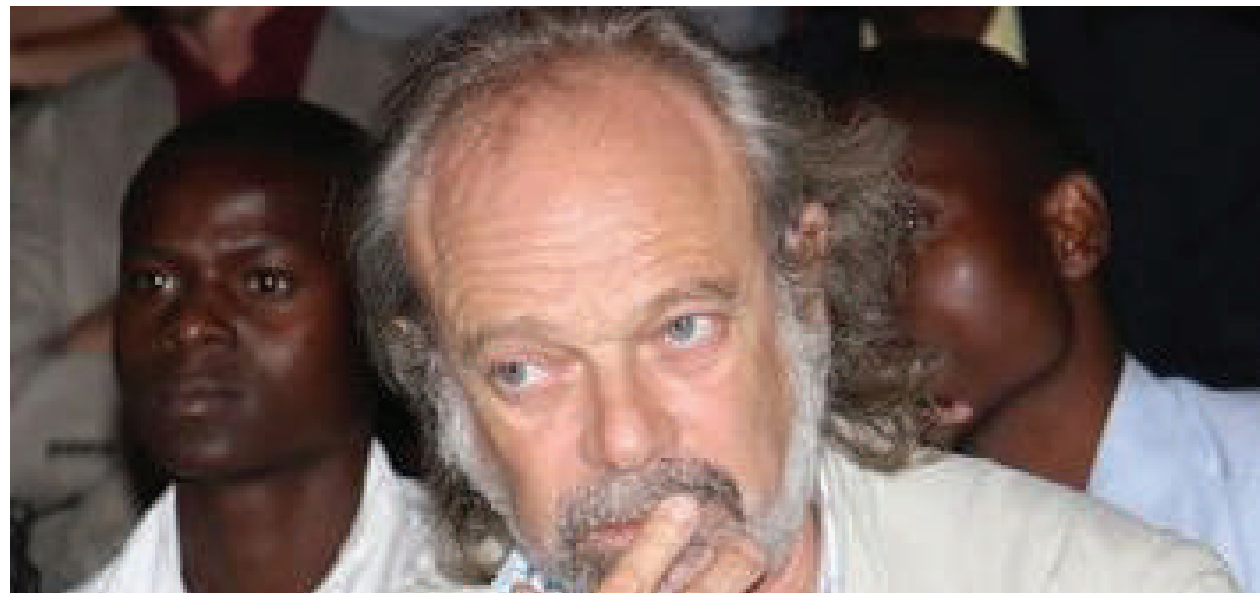
To put it mildly, this is a horrifying state of affairs — and provides us with a stark reminder of what has happened to Zimbabwe's media world in those seven years since I stepped down from the editor's chair.

Although the government has always been aware of the power of the media to influence public opinion, we can thank an old ally, Jonathan Moyo, for being the mastermind behind the government's unprecedented campaign to implement measures that enabled the authorities to gag the independent media and control all sources of information and the mainstream means of communication in the public sphere.

It was the lessons he learnt as the government's chief spin-doctor during the failed government's campaign to persuade the people of Zimbabwe to accept its constitutional reforms in 1999 and 2000 that provided Jonathan with the inspiration and enthusiasm as the minister of Information to set about laying waste to Zimbabwe's independent media.

By introducing laws that controlled and terrorized the media, he was able to suffocate the fundamental concept of freedom of expression under the guise of media “regulation” supported by his mantra of “the rule of law”.

As we all know only too well, Moyo's legacy still thrives today under the stewardship of less inspired minders, but minders nevertheless who are dedicated to ensuring that the people remain



Former Standard editor Andy Moyses



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ZIMBABWE INDEPENDENT

THE LEADING BUSINESS WEEKLY

Reflections from a former editor



Guests listen to speeches at a breakfast meeting to celebrate The Standard @25 in Harare on Monday

CONTINUED FROM S23

blind to the ever-more appalling excesses of Zimbabwe's ruling and privileged elite.

While I was preparing this speech I was reading through the old leader page comments that I compiled every week seeking some inspiration for what I should be talking to you about tonight.

What struck me most was that the issues that I wrote about then, at the turn of the millennium, are exactly the same issues that torment us most today.

Headlines like, "Election Stampede", "The Iron Fist", "The Vote You Need to Cast", "Media Gag", "Politics of the Corrupt" and "The Dangers of Tyranny" are an eerie echo of exactly the same problems that we are confronted with now.

I am constantly amazed at how dangerously short our memories are — mine included.

Today, the region's political leadership is making efforts to "ensure" that credible elections are held next year; there is talk of constitutional and electoral reforms that will help to guarantee that this happens, including the repeal of repressive laws.

The problems of corruption and a failed economy plague the nation on a daily basis...And a systematic campaign of violence aimed at terrorising the electorate has already been unleashed.

These were precisely the same issues that pre-occupied the media during my editorship at The Standard.

Only then the difference was that there was a real hope that the nation was about to witness the dawn of a new political dispensation...that none of the lunacies that we experienced then was going to last for much longer; we were all stunned and appalled at the extent of the violence and lawlessness that followed the constitutional referendum.

We are wiser now, tired and weary of the suffering and injustice that has become endemic in our lives.

But unlike the hopelessness of the 2005 election, 2008 brings with it a seed of hope that this time will be different.

Maybe...

But in the 10 years of its existence The Standard has seen it all...and you have a duty to help make that difference happen.

You stand alone as a newspaper group in a dark media landscape. But the people know what the truth is.

While you are still allowed to operate you have a duty to make sure that you get that truth into the public domain and to report accurately and from an informed perspective; to tell the world what is really happening as Zimbabwe heads towards this "final" election.

It will be difficult because you will almost certainly be alone in the business of gathering and disseminating the stories about what is happening in this coming election campaign.

But my advice to you tonight then is to use the wisdom of yesterday's experience to ensure that you are ready to report any manipulation of the electoral process and injustice when it arises and to provide as much empirical evidence as you can to prove your stories.

It will require investigation, diligence, sacrifice and a brave spirit.

But despite the deafening roar of the government's propaganda war for the hearts and minds of the nation in 1999, Zimbabweans listened to the small voice of the country's independent media and threw out a seriously flawed constitution.

Zimbabweans have been through seven long years of suffering since then — and they will be listening to that voice again next year.

They already are.

More than ever, The Standard and The Independent will have the responsibility of representing the real voice of the people.

I wish you good luck — you are not alone!

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