



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice
Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe – ZWE39568 – H-Metro
Newspaper – Bribery of Journalists
21 November 2011

1. Please provide information on “H-Metro” and its distribution.

H-Metro is a daily tabloid owned by the state-run Zimbabwe Newspapers (Zimpapers),^{1 2} and is known for “sensational articles and photography of Harare’s social life”.³ The website for *H-Metro* is <http://www.hmetrozim.com/>, and contains the online version of the print newspaper.⁴ The *H-Metro* website was reportedly registered in the United States in February 2010, and is the only Zimpapers website to be hosted outside of Zimbabwe.⁵

According to a 2011 Zimbabwe All Media Products and Services Survey, *H-Metro* is read by 9 per cent of Zimbabweans, although this figure climbs to 17 per cent in urban areas. In terms of this readership, *H-Metro* was ranked as the fourth most read newspaper in urban areas, and fifth in Zimbabwe overall. In addition, it is noted that 48 per cent of *H-Metro*’s readership is women, and 24 per cent is young people.⁶

H-Metro has been sued for defamation and making false allegations on a number of occasions. In October 2011, the National Constitutional Assembly initiated a libel suit against *H-Metro* for publishing an article which claimed that their spokesperson, Maddock Chivasa, had assaulted two prostitutes for denying him sex. In a letter to *H-Metro*’s editor, Chivasa stated that “[n]one of the allegations contained in the article and the editorial in question are factually correct...The offending article is therefore materially false, scurrilous and malicious. I was never contacted for a comment on the substance of the story before it was published”.⁷

In March 2011, local businessman and former journalist Edwin Masimba Moyo sued *H-Metro* for defamation over an article which claimed “that he had sneaked into the country wearing a wig and dressed like a woman for a private wedding”. The article also reportedly made allegations that Moyo “was entering into a marriage of convenience...in order to secure residency or citizenship in the UK [United Kingdom]”, and had failed to return cattle that he had borrowed from a relative. Moyo’s court application stated that “[t]he said words, in the

¹ ‘Zimbabwe: The Herald Tops Readership Market’ 2011, *All Africa Global Media*, source: *The Herald*, 29 September <http://allafrica.com/stories/201109290410.html> – Accessed 14 November 2011

² ‘Zimbabwean Online news websites hacked’ 2011, *The Zimbabwe Mail*, 4 October <http://www.thezimbabwemail.com/zimbabwe/9213-zimbabwean-online-news-websites-hacked.html> – Accessed 14 November 2011

³ ‘HMetro website down, again’ 2011, Technology Zimbabwe website, 25 October <http://www.techzim.co.zw/2011/10/hmetro-website-down-again/> – Accessed 14 November 2011

⁴ ‘HMetro website down, again’ 2011, Technology Zimbabwe website, 25 October <http://www.techzim.co.zw/2011/10/hmetro-website-down-again/> – Accessed 14 November 2011

⁵ ‘H-Metro website SUSPENDED’ (undated), My Zimbabwe website <http://www.myzimbabwe.co.zw/technology/it-news/205-h-metro-website-suspended.html> – Accessed 14 November 2011

⁶ ‘Zimbabwe: The Herald Tops Readership Market’ 2011, *All Africa Global Media*, source: *The Herald*, 29 September <http://allafrica.com/stories/201109290410.html> – Accessed 14 November 2011

⁷ ‘NCA to sue H-Metro’ 2011, *The Zimbabwean*, 25 October <http://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/news/zimbabwe/54024/nca-to-sue-h-metro.html> – Accessed 17 November 2011

context article, are wrongful and defamatory of the Plaintiff in that they were intended and were understood by readers of the newspaper to mean that the Plaintiff (Moyo) is dishonest, without moral fibre and is not a law-abiding citizen”.⁸

2. Has the H-Metro website been suspended?

The *H-Metro* website was suspended in October 2011,^{9 10} although appears to be up and running again; at the time of writing, the website was being regularly updated.¹¹

3. If so, when did this happen and why?

The *H-Metro* website was suspended in October 2011,^{12 13} although the length of the suspension is unclear. A search of the website indicates a break in news reporting between 29 September 2011 and 15 October 2011, and again from 15 October 2011 to 9 November 2011.¹⁴

An article on the Technology Zimbabwe website dated 25 October 2011 reports that the *H-Metro* website has been suspended “for some several days”. When visiting the website, the message “This site has been suspended” reportedly appears. Although the reasons for the suspension are unclear, the article indicates that “it’s usually a sign of compromise or, in rare cases that there are payment issues between the hosts and Zimpapers. The later [sic] is highly unlikely; web hosting is not an expensive service at all for an organisation the size of Zimpapers. The former, more likely as the website suffered a phishing attack early this month”.¹⁵

Another undated article on the My Zimbabwe website similarly states that the *H-Metro* website was suspended, although indicates that the suspension was most likely due to “unpaid web hosting renewal”. The article claims that “the website has not been updated” since 4 October 2011, when the site was hacked.¹⁶ *The Zimbabwe Mail* also reports that the *H-Metro* website was hacked on 4 October 2011, possibly due to “vulnerability in the security of the

⁸ Chimhete, C. 2011, ‘Zimbabwe: Businessman Sues H-Metro’, *All Africa Global Media*, source: *The Standard*, 13 March <http://allafrica.com/stories/201103141023.html> – Accessed 17 November 2011

⁹ ‘HMetro website down, again’ 2011, Technology Zimbabwe website, 25 October <http://www.techzim.co.zw/2011/10/hmetro-website-down-again/> – Accessed 14 November 2011

¹⁰ ‘H-Metro website SUSPENDED’ (undated), My Zimbabwe website <http://www.myzimbabwe.co.zw/technology/it-news/205-h-metro-website-suspended.html> – Accessed 14 November 2011

¹¹ ‘News’ 2011, *H-Metro*, 16 November http://www.hmetrozim.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=section&layout=blog&id=1&Itemid=165 – Accessed 17 November 2011

¹² ‘HMetro website down, again’ 2011, Technology Zimbabwe website, 25 October <http://www.techzim.co.zw/2011/10/hmetro-website-down-again/> – Accessed 14 November 2011

¹³ ‘H-Metro website SUSPENDED’ (undated), My Zimbabwe website <http://www.myzimbabwe.co.zw/technology/it-news/205-h-metro-website-suspended.html> – Accessed 14 November 2011

¹⁴ ‘News’ 2011, *H-Metro*, 9 November http://www.hmetrozim.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=section&layout=blog&id=1&Itemid=165 – Accessed 17 November 2011

¹⁵ ‘HMetro website down, again’ 2011, Technology Zimbabwe website, 25 October <http://www.techzim.co.zw/2011/10/hmetro-website-down-again/> – Accessed 14 November 2011

¹⁶ ‘H-Metro website SUSPENDED’ (undated), My Zimbabwe website <http://www.myzimbabwe.co.zw/technology/it-news/205-h-metro-website-suspended.html> – Accessed 14 November 2011

site that random hackers” have exploited. Attacks such as that suffered by the *H-Metro* website are reportedly fairly common.¹⁷

4. Deleted.

5. Deleted.

6. Is there any information indicating that it is possible to pay to have articles included in this or other Zimbabwean publications?

Freedom House reported in 2011 that poor economic conditions and inadequate salaries in Zimbabwe have led to rampant “journalistic corruption and cash incentives for coverage”.¹⁸ A September 2011 report on the media in Zimbabwe similarly found that corruption among media professionals is common, due to poor salaries. It is reported that “[j]ournalists often accept financial inducements to slant their reports in favour of a particular individual or organization”.¹⁹

A May 2011 article on the Zim Diaspora website highlights similar complaints by the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ) that poor remuneration of media professionals has led to their exploitation through bribes. At a World Press Freedom Day event in Bulawayo, ZUJ President Dumisani Sibanda stated “that media houses were not paying decent salaries to journalists resulting in the journalism standards deteriorating because workers are compromised by sources”.²⁰

Additionally, in May 2010, Zimbabwean Information and Publicity Minister Webster Shamu advised the Zimbabwe Media Commission “that certain reporters were not averse to taking financial rewards to produce positive news reports on individuals and organisations. Others were taking bribes to conceal information...while others were taking bribes to publicly lynch some individuals or organisations”. Shamu further stated that “bribery was killing journalism in Zimbabwe” and can be attributed to inadequate training and registration of journalists.²¹

7. Deleted.

¹⁷ ‘Zimbabwean Online news websites hacked’ 2011, *The Zimbabwe Mail*, 4 October
<http://www.thezimbabwemail.com/zimbabwe/9213-zimbabwean-online-news-websites-hacked.html> – Accessed 14 November 2011

¹⁸ Freedom House 2011, *Freedom of the Press 2011 – Zimbabwe*, UNHCR Refworld website, 27 October
<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4ea952cd1a.html> – Accessed 15 November 2011

¹⁹ Infoasaid 2011, *Zimbabwe: Media and Telecoms Landscape Guide*, Infoasaid website, September, p.11
<http://infoasaid.org/sites/infoasaid.org/files/ZIMBABWE%20Media%20and%20Telecoms%20final%2010911.pdf>
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²⁰ ‘Zimbabwe journalists on bribes due to poor pay’ 2011, Zim Diaspora website, 24 May
http://www.zimdiaspora.com/index.php/news/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5722:zimbabwe-journalist-surviving-on-bribes-due-to-poor-pay&catid=38:travel-tips&Itemid=18 – Accessed 15 November 2011

²¹ ‘Bribery killing journalism, says Shamu’ 2010, *The Zimbabwean*, 26 May
<http://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/news/31303/bribery-killing-journalism-says-shamu.html> – Accessed 15 November 2011

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http://www.hmetrozim.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=section&layout=blog&id=1&Itemid=165 – Accessed 17 November 2011.
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http://www.zimdiaspora.com/index.php/news/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5722:zimbabwe-journalist-surviving-on-bribes-due-to-poor-pay&catid=38:travel-tips&Itemid=18 – Accessed 15 November 2011.
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