

'African journalists reliving Nat Nakasa's struggle' - Zimbabwean journalist Hopewell Chin'ono

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Hopewell Chin'ono: 'Fighting corruption is something that we should all do, and it's not my fight alone'.

Photo: Jekesai Njikizana, AFP

- The South African National Editors Forum has honoured journalists for their work during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The 2021 Nat Nakasa Award was conferred on CEO and co-founder of Daily Maverick Styli Charalambous.
- Speaking virtually during the ceremony, renowned Zimbabwean journalist Hopewell Chin'ono said Nat Nakasa would be disappointed to learn that journalists were still being victimised.

Zimbabwean journalist Hopewell Chin'ono says, while journalists today should be reading about Nat Nakasa's difficult journey as a journalist as part of history, they were instead reliving his struggle.

Chin'ono delivered his keynote address at the Nat Nakasa Award ceremony virtually on Saturday evening, after the Zimbabwe High Court failed to make a ruling on his application to have his passport released for travel.

The SA National Editors' Forum (SANEF) had invited Chin'ono to be its keynote speaker at the ceremony.

He had asked the court on 6 August for his passport to be released, but no ruling was made.

Speaking virtually during the ceremony, Chin'ono said it was evident that thousands of journalists, including himself, were still subjected to legalised and political persecution by governments.

"It is deeply painful that the road travelled by our brother [and] colleague Nat Nakasa is still being travelled by many journalists across the continent, including myself in my own home country of Zimbabwe.

"We should have been reading about Nat Nakasa's difficult journey as a historical subject which doesn't apply to today's lived realities. Unfortunately, this history keeps repeating itself on the African continent.

"The cruellest aspect of this repeated history is that Nat Nakasa was a victim of apartheid. Yet today, hundreds, if not thousands of journalists, are subjected to the same environment of legalised, political persecution by black governments that were meant to put an end to this state sponsored indignities," he said.

He added that African journalists, like himself, were being victimised by their governments and being charged for incitement and libel while all they did was their job, exposing the looting of public funds and natural resources by politicians.

"The biggest hospital in Zimbabwe, Sally Mugabe Hospital, has only two maternity theatres which were built by the colonial regime in 1977. Only one of them is working today. 2 500 Zimbabwean women die giving birth every year in Zimbabwe," Chin'ono said.

He said this was caused by looting of state funds and natural resources, adding that gold worth \$100 million was smuggled out of the country every month by Zanu-PF politicians.

To put this into perspective, all of Zimbabwe's central hospital only required \$50 million to run smoothly. Its two-year budget was being looted monthly, said Chin'ono.

He said, like Nakasa, many Zimbabweans had been forced to leave the country of their birth.

He pointed out that Nakasa would be disappointed that, 55 years after his death, the fight against oppression continues.

Nakasa would also be disappointed to know that Zimbabwe only had a state-owned television station.

"My invitation to speak here tonight is also a testimony to South Africa's strong presence of a free press. In my country there are many institutions which are afraid to be associated with me, for fear of being labelled anti-government and losing government contracts and or being harassed," Chin'ono said.

He added that many prominent Zimbabweans who invited him to their homes were afraid to make his visits known.

Chin'ono reiterated that his invitation to the ceremony was also a powerful statement of unity by South African journalism.

"I am quite aware that my presence here tonight is not just about myself as an individual. I am representing many journalists across the continent who are under persecution.

"Your invitation was not just for me, but for all journalists who are persevering under terrible conditions like what Nat Nakasa went through and it serves as a beacon of hope for all of them, including myself," he said.

During the ceremony, Sanef honoured reporters across the country for their Covid-19 coverage.

Five community radio stations were also honoured for their determination and bravery in serving their communities.

CEO and co-founder of Daily Maverick, Styli Charalambous, was the recipient of the Nat Nakasa Award for 2021.

Daily Maverick was recognised for becoming one of the leading online and print publications since its inception in South Africa.

Charalambous was lauded for his commitment and passion for media.

EWN editor-in-chief and Sanef secretary-general Mahlatse Mahlase was the recipient of the Stephen Wrottesley Award for her passion, professionalism and commitment to the forum, and dedication to media freedom and ethics.

GroundUp editor Natahan Geffen and Raymond Joseph jointly won the award for Courageous Journalism in Community Media for their exposure of lottery corruption.

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