

THE ZIMBABWE CRISIS AND THE WAY FORWARD.

Remarks by

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The dimensions of the Zimbabwe crisis are mutating and seemingly becoming more pervasive throughout every aspect of our political, economic and social life. The regime has consolidated all its arsenal to defend personal privileges. So that to the ordinary Zimbabwean citizen and international observer, the forces of democracy have become even more embattled, more beleaguered than at any time in the past three years. But the democratic forces have remained resilient and will ultimately wither the storm of tyranny. The old adage still holds: The darkest hour is before dawn. The regime has expended all its resources of tyranny and the will of the people shall prevail.

However in the context of this onslaught, there are some fundamental questions, which every Zimbabwean democrat and democratic forces are asking:

- Has the democratic movement in Zimbabwe hit a brick wall or is it in a cul de sac?
- Are we in retreat in the face of this determined tyrannical onslaught?
- Are we in a state of paralysis?
- In which particular direction are the forces of democratic change moving?
- And finally, does the stolen presidential election represent new and qualitatively different circumstances and challenges, which call for alternative strategies?

The answers to these fundamental questions define and condition our agenda for action now and in the future.

The majority of Zimbabweans looked towards the aftermath of the presidential poll with rekindled hope. They expected to experience positively changed circumstances in their economic, political and social lives. They expected that the aftermath of the presidential poll would present them with boundless opportunities to forge a new and more enduring political culture. They yearned for a period of national healing, in which the nation could come to terms with its traumatic experience and devise strategies to handle the political demons of the past three years in a mature and constructive way that would permanently vaccinate against future relapses into tyrannical evil and darkness. So, to many Zimbabweans, the stolen presidential election had a much more devastating effect than any physical catastrophe could ever have achieved. It was a shattering setback for change.

All the visions and hopes for a new democratic political dispensation appeared shattered by the stolen presidential poll. The cherished agenda for a new democratic political dispensation and political culture appeared to have been negatively re-written through sustained state terror and violence.

However, this did not kill people's hope for change.

In the context of this derailment from the preferred course of deliberate and positive change, where are we now and where are we going? In order to chart an effective path for the future, we have to have an accurate picture of where we are. There is absolutely no doubt that in the aftermath of March 2002, we are in the middle of a ferocious struggle against the massive forces of a qualitatively different and more dangerous form of tyranny. At independence in 1980, the people of Zimbabwe regained their national sovereignty and with it, albeit theoretically, their basic freedoms and national independence. Tragically since 1980, the Mugabe regime has been encroaching on both national sovereignty and the people's basic freedoms. The stolen presidential election completed this negative process of change. Today we therefore face vastly changed political circumstances without precedent in our history of independence. The process of subverting and ultimately neutralising of the people's sovereignty has been completed. The people are no longer sovereign and basic freedoms have been abolished. The Mugabe regime has redefined national sovereignty to mean that Mugabe is now sovereign. He has become a benevolent dictator who grants and withdraws basic freedoms according to the whims of his temper.

People's basic freedoms are now under quarantine, there are confined to a political arena that has been effectively shrunk. Through the effective closure of democratic space, people have been violently forced to depart from democratic political activity into prescribed spaces defined and created by the dictatorship. The will of the people as expressed through their representatives in the legislature has been subverted. One absolute ruler now wields the functions of the judiciary and law enforcement agencies. Mugabe's will is violently rendered the will of the people. The fusion of the three pillars of state, i.e. the executive, the judiciary and the legislature, has resulted in the obliteration of the last vestiges of a civilian administration. This is a veritable coup de' tat against the regime's own shoddy constitution that is in place. Therefore, what confronts us in Zimbabwe today is an absolute dictator presiding over a civil-military junta and imposing an illegitimate government on the people. So the new and lived reality in Zimbabwe today is that after a long and bloody protracted struggle, Mugabe has completed putting in place a repressive infrastructure to become an absolute monarch, presiding over a totalitarian state.

This new situation gives rise to two further fundamental questions:

- Have the democratic forces lost the struggle for democratic freedom?
- Are the conventional methods of democratic struggle still relevant in the present circumstance?

Before answering these questions, let me complete the picture of where we are today. The total emasculation of people's political power has been complemented by another strategy to reduce the majority of the population economically to the level of Stone Age scavengers available for manipulation and abuse by Mugabe and his cronies.

At the level of the economy, the impact of totalitarianism has been devastating. The collapse of the delivery systems for health, education, other social services and material commodities is almost complete. National economic output has declined by 11% down from 9% in December 2001. Cereal production in general and maize production in particular has declined by 69% and 77% respectively on the 2000/2001 production levels. The national currency has been eroding at a fast rate than the regime can print the money; spending on vital services such as health and education has dwindled while the associated costs to the individual have risen astronomically to 2106% and 857% respectively. The HIV/Aids pandemic is devastating the nation and the regime has no resources to bring about relief.

About 81% of the people are now living below the Poverty Datum Line (PDL) and the unemployment rate of economically active people is equally high. The young section of the population entering the job market for the first time has been hit hardest. For instance there are no jobs available for the over 4000 graduates who graduated from our national universities this year. Although spending on the army and police has increased by leaps and bounds, this has not even resulted in any meaningful efficiency in the professional standing of these national forces. The conditions of service of the ordinary soldier and policeman have actually deteriorated, while the officer corps has cornered the major portion of the budgetary allocations for their personal comforts.

Hunger and starvation are decimating the nation especially the more vulnerable rural communities with few alternatives for survival. Entire rural communities are being denied food and subjected to an incessant regime of political violence, because they steadfastly refuse to submit to Mugabe's tyranny. The run-up to the local government elections has seen violence and denial of food relief as the most lethal weapons in the regime's bid to snuff out any remaining vestiges of the people's democratic rights.

What this means is that the regime's war against people's democratic rights is neatly dovetailing into an onslaught on the peoples' last survival refuge, i.e. the deliberate destruction and denial of the people's means of sustenance. As we all know, poverty defeats all possibilities. In the final analysis, the regime's comprehensive strategy is to weaken the population both economically and politically and render them totally defenceless against the designs of tyrannical rule.

The battle lines between the people and the dictatorship have never been more sharply and profoundly drawn. In this combative equation, the biggest threat to Mugabe's absolutism is the people's refusal to be crushed and their stubborn determination to resist.

Which is the way forward?

We remain resolute in our conviction that the illegitimate Mugabe regime shall not be allowed to consolidate and make its fraud permanent. The people must and will reclaim their stolen victory. As a nation born out of a revolution we know that freedom comes at a price and we

have absolutely no intention of letting the dictator hold the nation to ransom and in shackles forever.

As a political party, which believes in peace and democracy rather than violent confrontation, immediately after the stolen presidential poll, we accepted an invitation from Nigeria and South Africa to give dialogue a chance. We entered into negotiations with ZANU PF even though we knew from the beginning that the regime regarded the whole exercise as strategy to buy time and assuage people and that both Nigeria and South Africa were more interested in managing the crisis rather than its resolution. So from the very beginning there were no ingredients for the talks to succeed. Whatever the future holds Zimbabweans and history will absolve us.

We face vastly changed circumstances from those that confronted us before the stolen presidential election, but it is important to emphasize that the democratic movement is neither in retreat nor paralysis. The struggle for freedom under these changed circumstances has just begun. The illegitimate Mugabe regime is on the run. We must now employ qualitatively different methods of struggle from the ones that won us the 2002 presidential elections. Within the MDC, this new phase of the struggle has already started. As a political party, since our arrival on the Zimbabwean political landscape, we had never had ample opportunity to put in place solid and purposive structures to enable us to enter the political fray and come out triumphant.

The process of party building went hand-in-hand with real political combat on the ground during the parliamentary elections in June 2000, the presidential elections in March 2002 and during the various local government victories that we registered. The violent onslaught by ZANU PF found our structures in a state of infancy, but we survived. We fought battles while simultaneously building the party and we survived. Our first major task was to reorganise and strengthen the party. That programme was completed at the end of August 2002 and we are ready to go into mortal combat against the illegitimate regime.

The starting point of our new struggle must be rooted in our history. We must go back to the noble ideals of the liberation struggle, which have been prostituted and monopolized by the illegitimate Mugabe regime. We must re-dedicate ourselves to the unflinching quest for justice, freedom, peace, prosperity and the restoration of the supremacy of the sovereign will of the people. These are the ideals of the liberation movement abandoned by the Mugabe regime, which have now come to describe the inner soul of the MDC. This rededication calls for new strategies to galvanise the people of Zimbabwe to confront the dictatorship wherever and whenever it rears its ugly head.

In the ferocious struggle that lies ahead, the MDC must undergo a period of rebirth or renewal. It must go back to its roots, to its cradle, to its base. As a Social Democratic Party we believe in the strength of purposive unity of all progressive social forces. The coming mass

storm against tyranny must obliterate all artificial and tactical strategies among the MDC, the labour movement, the civic organizations and the constitutional movement in order to forge a purposive alliance for a PEOPLE'S STORM in a final confrontation with autocracy. We must reach out to all the progressive forces in society, such as the Church organisations, which share with us the same values of democracy, peace, good governance and human rights. Each of the components of the PEOPLE'S STORM must build certain purposive competences, with the participation of the people of Zimbabwe, competences that will lead to the last push on the corrupt and dictatorial regime that has relied on raw power to subjugate the people. The culture of democratic activism and instinctive resistance to tyranny must be continuously cultivated.

The question that many of you are burning to ask is whether mass action is still on the agenda. My answer is that, we shall never acquiesce to tyranny. The Mugabe regime has been busy over the past few months preparing a fertile ground for an unavoidable and unstoppable show of people's power. The momentum for this is being generated daily by the regime's actions. We are impelled by circumstances to move inexorably in that direction. But this does not call for adventurism, the temptation to which must be resisted at all costs. During periods of crisis such as the one we are experiencing, frustration at the seemingly slow pace of events and overall change, might tempt some sections of the broad democratic movement to abandon the common strategy and vision and come up with sectional programmes that may appear to hold the key to the resolution of the crisis, leading to the abandonment of a common platform for the struggle and the corresponding weakening of the democratic front.

There may be a mistaken view that there could be other alternative visions out there when it seems that the present shared vision is taking too long to accomplish. Such individual adventurism is a negative force in the process of amalgamating and harnessing people's power. It feeds on all efforts to galvanise a united people's front against tyranny. We must all synchronise and consolidate our efforts in a final show down against autocracy. Whatever action we take must be strategically calculated to yield the desired results. There can no room for failure or rearguard remedial action.

We are aware that the Mugabe regime is putting in place strategies to divide the united stand of all the democratic forces in the country through such diabolical schemes as the so-called government of national unity or GNU in order to avoid an election re-run and compromise the people's desire to reclaim their stolen victory. The systematic brutalisation of the democratic forces that has been sustained since the stolen presidential election is part of a grand strategy to weaken the opposition and ultimately swallow it through the so-called government of national unity. To the concept of a GNU our answer has not changed. We say NO to any attempt to expand and legitimise fraud. We remain unshaken in our conviction that the only way out of the present crisis is through a fresh free and fair presidential poll under international supervision. On that score there can be no compromise or surrender. We are also aware that the regime intends to imprison or drive into exile a certain number of MDC

legislators in order to enable it to achieve a two-thirds majority in parliament and thereby facilitate a change in the current constitution to enable Mugabe to slide into oblivion without the need for a fresh presidential poll as mandated by the current constitution. Our response to that ruse is quite predictable. The people will massively resist any illegitimate tempering with the constitution. We shall never allow the political proceeds from fraud to be inherited by Mugabe's handpicked successor.

Some people may be wondering why we still take part in elections in view of the fact that they are routinely rigged and as such, continued participation in the electoral charade exposes people to physical danger and demoralisation. Yes elections have yielded death and destruction, but we cannot abandon them. Elections are part and parcel of our broad strategy to remove Mugabe from power. As a democratic movement, which believes in the creation of an enduring democratic culture in the country, we value the democratic educative value of elections. They are an essential component of our national political curricula and political practice to build a democratic culture.

However, should we decide in the long run that this route has run its course, then we will have to devise other effective non-violent modes of political combat. But this will mean that the people are organized to the strength of an unshakeable bundle. Such an alternative course of action must be sustainable. It cannot meaningfully be just an angry knee-jerk reaction with no chance of successfully withstanding the inevitable onslaught from the dictatorial regime. Mugabe has already declared that he is ready to shade more blood in order to remain in power, so again in this scenario, adventurism could be counterproductive. Casualties on Zimbabwean citizens must be avoided or minimized. This calls for the leadership of all the democratic forces to be responsible and minimize chaos.

The final choice on when to change course, strategy and tactics might not necessarily lie with the formal structures of the organised democratic movements. It must be remembered that over the past three years it is the MDC, which has kept the peace in the face of a sustained regime of state terror and violence. After the March 2002 presidential poll, during the politically charged and explosive atmosphere that engulfed the nation, we counselled restraint when people were ready to mount barricades and go into the trenches. As a political party we chose the legal route in challenging Mugabe's electoral fraud, as a practical demonstration of our sincerity in the quest for peace even though the regime was taunting us to take up arms.

And this is also why we have always had a peaceful political solution to the crisis, i.e. a re-run of the presidential poll under internationally supervised free and fair conditions, rather than a call to arms. We have therefore acted as a restraining force on the people to desist from confronting violence with violence. But now we have reached a stage whereby it may no longer be possible to keep the lead on. The people are angry. They are being battered, murdered, raped, tortured and brutalised on a daily basis with no end in sight. Whatever happens from now on is entirely the regime's responsibility. The people cannot take it any longer.

So the launching pad to reclaim our stolen victory must be the immediate strengthening and consolidation of all the democratic forces in the country. Our goal remains the speedy installation of an MDC government.

However we realize that dictatorship is not simply an internal problem. Rather it is a regional, continental and international problem. The denial of a democratic entitlement to good governance is a recognised international problem, which in many circumstances before our own predicament, has jogged the conscience of the international community and has routinely jolted it into action. Murder, crimes against humanity and the systematic violation of human rights are international problems and so is the deliberate sabotage of sustainable development.

We therefore call upon all progressive forces in the region and the continent to rise up to the Mugabe outrage. Mugabe's dictatorial project points to nobody's future. It undermines collective efforts at regional and continental advance. We call upon the SADC region to be steadfast and resolutely confront the Mugabe tyranny. We call upon President Mbeki to rise up and assume the regional leadership for which we have waited for so long. We wish to remind him that the resolution of the Zimbabwe crisis is not altruistic, but it is for the common good of all of us. We call upon President Obasanjo of Nigeria to show the same kind of resolve that he demonstrated when confronting evil in his own country. To the Commonwealth, we ask for increased political and diplomatic pressure on the Mugabe regime. Most importantly, the United Nations should not remain on the sidelines, when crimes against humanity are being committed by this brutal, corrupt and murderous regime. To the rest of the international community, we say: we cherish your past support, please remain with us as we walk the last mile towards our freedom.

I hold no brief from Mugabe, but his standpoint, like that of all bloody dictators is simple to grasp: All democratic forces that dare challenge his autocracy must be literally killed or slaughtered. This is what he considers to be the final solution to all the democratic challenges to his illegitimacy. I have a message for him from all the democratic forces in Zimbabwe:

You cannot destroy an idea that defines the people's preferred circumstances and conditions of living. Your bullets cannot stop the tide of change. Bloodshed from an illegitimate regime can never, and in history has never, neutralized the potency of change that has to happen.

Finally, my message to my fellow Zimbabwe remains very simple. Freedom is not free. As that illustrious son of Africa, Nelson Mandela prophetically said all those years ago: There is no easy walk to freedom. Fellow Zimbabweans, the remainder of the path to our freedom is still littered with skeletons and splashed with the blood of innocent people. Lets soldier on with courage and determination.