



# **POLITICAL ISSUES IN TRANSITION**

*Presentation and Group Discussion*

## PRESENTATION

In his presentation<sup>14</sup>, Professor Raftopoulos stressed the need for hope in combatting the Mugabe regime. Zanu PF was described as a party now largely based on coercion and force which has constrained political space and reduced the ability of Zimbabweans to imagine alternatives. In addition, there is lasting damage caused to the limited structures of public accountability that were still available in the country.

The ruling party has proscribed the limits of public debate, and authorises who may and may not speak and be heard in the body politic.

The major discussion around constitutional reform that generated such an inclusive discussion around state-citizen relations between 1998-2000, has been relegated to the background of Zimbabwean politics.



**Ms Nancy Kachingwe and Prof. Brian Raftopoulos**

As the economy continues its decline, the chances of building a sustainable basis for the ruling party's project become more remote. The accumulation strategies of the ruling party elite are connected to the plundering of state assets and the control over strategic commodities such as fuel. Lower structures of the ruling party, including members of the youth

militia, and sections of the police and army have used their political control functions as occasions to loot property in the name of the maintenance of law and order.

Zimbabwean politics is characterised by:

- a growing political polarisation;
- a serious undermining of the judiciary and the police force;
- loss of professionalism in the public sector; militarisation of the youth; loss of faith in the fairness of the electoral system; and a gross loss of confidence in the capacity of the state to protect the majority of its citizenry.
- when added to the deepening poverty of the majority and decreasing capacity of the labour force to reproduce itself, Zimbabwe represents a very volatile situation.

**“Many African leaders are trying to persuade Zimbabweans to ignore the regime’s poor governance record.”**

In contrast with this is an opposition party and a grouping of civic bodies that have maintained their commitment to peaceful political protest, while exposing the wide range of abuses that have characterised the Mugabe regime.

Thus Zimbabwe is caught in the midst of a political stalemate, with a ruling party which rules by force, and an opposition movement unable at present to mobilise peaceful protest to have a decisive impact on the state. Many African leaders are therefore trying to persuade Zimbabweans to ignore the current regime's human rights abuses, poor governance record and economic mismanagement in order to accept their nationalist credentials and the positioning this provides Zimbabwe in the context of regional and global politics. Many Zimbabweans are convinced that the country deserves better, we must hope that most Southern Africans agree.

14 See Appendix 9 for Raftopoulos' summary of his presentation.

## GROUP DISCUSSION

Group discussion focussed around the following questions:

1. Do you agree that we are in a political stalemate in Zimbabwe? If so what are the main features of this stalemate?
2. If not how would you describe the situation in Zimbabwe?

There was agreement that Zanu PF was the main obstacle to dialogue. In addition, the major players in the dialogue process are the regional powers led by South Africa that view Zimbabwe as a failed state. Zimbabwe is in a political stalemate but there is need to look beyond the political parties as being able to thrash out the solution to the crises by themselves.

**“Dialogue at an elite level does not address participatory issues.”**

3. Do we need a political dialogue in the country or should the civic movement be pushing for more confrontational forms activity against the state?

There is need to ensure that there is involvement of the people within the dialogue process because dialogue at an elite level does not address participatory issues. There is a fair amount of complacency around the talks by the people as well as sections of civil society because of the lack of knowledge around the issues that characterise the talks.

4. What processes should be put in place to facilitate a political dialogue?
5. What form should this dialogue take?
6. What major issues should inform the dialogue?
7. If there is no movement towards dialogue, what alternatives are open to the civic movement?

On the brokering of the dialogue there was debate as to whether there is need to have an interlocutor from outside or within the country. The role of the

churches was brought up as a critical role that can be used as an entry point by civil society into the dialogue process.

Within Zanu Pf there are divisions that need to be taken advantage of in order to spur on the dialogue process that will involve CSO's. At the same time there is need to lobby for less partisanship within the regional leadership. This would mean engaging the heads of state that are playing the leading role in the process to be more open and neutral in their interventions in the Zimbabwean crises.

Civil society should be a united front without worrying too much about non-partisanship. Some participants believed that the united front must be forged with the opposition Movement for Democratic Change because there is a common denominator of the desire for democratic change in Zimbabwe.

### **Possible strategies for CSO visibility in dialogue process:**

The strategies that must be put in place for dialogue to begin in earnest as well as with the involvement of civil society must include:

- Mass action around the repressive Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA);
- The involvement of the church in building bridges between the political parties;
- The establishment and maintenance of a united CSO front with a strong relationship with the MDC.
- Strategising at regional and international level in order to put pressure for dialogue.
- A TRC process that ensures accountability so that people are clear about who is forgiving whom.

## RESOLUTIONS

From its discussion, the group proposed the following recommendations:

- Repealing of POSA and AIPPA and the need for civil society to plan campaigns around the two Acts
- Release of political prisoners as a sign of goodwill before the talks
- 19<sup>th</sup> of July campaign against the repressive Laws to commemorate the 7000 people march in 1966 where people from Highfield including President Mugabe participated to protest against the Law and Order Maintenance Act which has now been reborn as POSA
- Strengthening of Churches' mediation role and ensuring that they advance issues arising from the civil society groups
- Civil Society to merge alliances with churches on bread and butter issues
- Identification of ZANU PF members that civil society can dialogue with
- Forging international and regional alliances without interference with the course of action that Zimbabweans want.
- Civil society to ensure that they are not discouraged from participating in the talks to resolve the Zimbabwean crisis. There was need to map out a strategy including lobbying the region and other eminent persons on the inclusion of civil society at the negotiating table.
- Civil Society to ensure that its voice is heard during the Maputo AU meeting, during President Bush's visit to South Africa and other similar meetings.