

Zimbabwe

ACTSA Position Paper - January 2010

February 2010 will mark the anniversary of the formation of an inclusive government for Zimbabwe.

ACTSA

1. Welcomes the start that has been made by the Unity Government in Zimbabwe on resolving some of the country's desperate problems, but recognises that much more still needs to change;
2. Is deeply concerned about the harassment and other difficulties facing political, trade union and other civil society activists and organisations, and expresses its continuing solidarity with all those affected;
3. Understands the need for caution by outside countries such as the UK in offering financial and other support to government structures in Zimbabwe because of the risk of exacerbating problems rather than resolving them;
4. Believes, however, that much more could be done by the UK and other governments, on a step-by-step basis, to fund the restoration of basic services through Zimbabwe's state structures and that this could greatly strengthen the hand of those working for the restoration of democracy and human rights as well as beginning to meet the desperate needs of the country's people;

The Inclusive Government agreed to by the Global Political Agreement was formed in February 2009. It has been at best an uneasy coalition where the main political parties have come together but there is still great disagreement and little trust.

Changes

There have been changes and improvements: most notably on the economy. Zimbabwe now has two currencies neither of them its own; the US Dollar or the South African Rand. Inflation has ceased. Some parts of the economy are functioning. There are goods again in shops but most are at prices beyond the reach of the Zimbabwean who does not have access to foreign currency. There is increased food availability. It is currently estimated approx three million Zimbabweans will need food aid in 2010 as compared to seven million in 2009. The health and education services have been working better than for some time albeit from a low base. Whilst there are still controls on local media, the international media such as the BBC and CNN have been allowed to freely report from Zimbabwe again. There are still human rights violations although the human rights situation is better than it was.

Political impasse

There is an impasse politically. Negotiators from the three main political parties are likely to resolve some issues however the key areas of political disagreement are likely to be passed to SADC mediation led by South Africa. In essence what is at the heart of the political disagreement is whether this is an inclusive government in which the MDC has been invited to be part of, but in which Zanu-PF maintains real control

over the state machinery or a form of power sharing where all parties have some control of the state machinery.

New constitution?

A process and timetable to produce a new constitution has been set out. Some, such as the National Constitution Assembly and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, have rejected participating in the constitutional process as they believe it does not conform to their stated position of a people driven constitutional process.

Any real alternative?

Despite the problems there seems little real option to the inclusive or a power sharing government. If the opposition withdraws what does it do? What other than early democratic elections can it call for? If it withdrew could it mobilise Zimbabweans in effective peaceful action? For Zanu-PF withdrawal seems even more unlikely. Both know withdrawal would not gain them support from countries in the region.

International community

The international community has increased support for both humanitarian programmes and more. The UK has pledged funding of £100 million; an increase from its previous humanitarian support of £60 million. Real substantial western financial support is likely to depend on significant political as well as economic development. The action many would want to see before calling for and/or providing major government to government support is;

- Resolution of outstanding issues including process of appointments of key government officials- e.g. Governor of Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, Attorney General, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and ambassadors.
- Cessation of arbitrary arrests of journalists, lawyers, trade union leaders, civic leaders, human rights activists and MDC members.
- Unconditional dropping of politically-motivated charges facing political prisoners, human rights activists and lawyers.
- Cessation of inflammatory reporting in the broadcast and print media.
- Cessation of politicisation of food aid and threats to INGO's.
- Halting of fresh farm seizures.
- Respect for the rule of law and court orders.
- Stop the State's interference with the judiciary.
- Stopping of political violence.
- Disbanding of militia bases in rural communities.
- Putting in place legislative and media reform.

Zanu-PF is arguing that the MDC and Tsvangirai should be doing more, and be seen to be doing more, to end the sanctions (targeted measures) of the EU, US, Australia, Canada and others.

Diaspora

There is also the situation of the Zimbabwean diaspora in the region and internationally. Without a feeling that there is concrete positive change which is irreversible many Zimbabweans outside Zimbabwe will want to keep their options open. In South Africa, which is hosting an estimated three million Zimbabweans, there have been a number of incidents of violence toward them. Most Zimbabweans in South Africa have not been attacked. In the UK some Zimbabweans continue to be denied the right to work or study with their status unclear.

Summary

Will the inclusive (multiparty) government formed in February 2009 on the basis of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) (signed September 08) hold? Will there be freedom to organise? Will the process of drawing up a new constitution gain trust? Will there be economic recovery? ACTSA will continue its campaigning work on Zimbabwe in support of democracy, rights and development including reconstruction and recovery. It is Zimbabweans who must lead and decide their future. It is they who will decide if the political settlement is working in their best interests.

We recognise that Zimbabweans need and welcome international support. We will provide this based on shared values and a common vision. We are guided by key partners including the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and other leading civil society groups. Based on their input ACTSA will campaign for international support to assist reconstruction and recovery of Zimbabwe. ACTSA will seek to influence the policy of the UK Government and European Union to Zimbabwe and monitor both what they do and also the response of the wider international community. ACTSA, after consulting the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, is continuing its Dignity! Period. campaign to increase awareness of the needs and priorities of women in Zimbabwe and provide a practical means of meeting one of those needs that other organisations are not doing.

The situation in Zimbabwe did not suddenly arise. (See earlier ACTSA position paper on Zimbabwe on the ACTSA website www.actsa.org also available from the ACTSA office). The problems the country now faces are rooted in the history of Zimbabwe, in the failures and policies of the Mugabe/Zanu-PF government and also those of international institutions. To move forward with effective support for the people of Zimbabwe we need to understand how and why Zimbabwe's political and economic crisis developed. The UK must play its role in addressing inequality and injustice from colonial rule especially on land and support an effective, transparent and equitable solution to land rights.

The key challenge is whether there is real political improvement and continued financial improvement.