

Zimbabwe constitutional talks resume

Thursday 16th July

Talks have resumed in Harare between the Zimbabwean government and civil society in the country's first All Stakeholders Constitutional Conference. The conference had previously been brought to a premature end after scuffles broke out when supporters of Robert Mugabe disrupted the opening speech by dancing and singing.

Both President Robert Mugabe and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangari condemned the disturbances before the conference resumed on 14th July.

The conference marks the beginning of what is supposed to be a year of consultations on the proposed constitution to be followed by a referendum and elections.

Civil society and the trade union movement are concerned that the process of developing a new constitution is being led by parliament. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) has consistently called for a people driven process, to decide on the country's new constitution, rather than a parliamentary led process. Mugabe's Zanu-PF party, on the other hand, is said to want a constitution based on the Kariba Draft, drawn up solely by the political parties in 2007. According to critics, the Kariba draft gives the president a great deal of executive power.

At the beginning of July representatives of Civil Society Organisations met for the 2009 People's Constitutional Convention to determine their demands and principles for engagement in the constitutional reform process. The ZCTU declined the invitation to participate in the convention, in order to protect its mandate and position, but did wish the organisers and everyone participating in the current process well.

The ZCTU has taken a principled position not to participate in the current consultation process in an approach based on the Declaration of the National Working People's Convention, held in 1999. The convention demanded that 'The writing of a people's constitution be initiated with immediate effect, through a constitutional commission not based on presidential/partisan appointment, but defined by and accountable to a conference of representatives of elected, civil and other social groups'.