



Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> March

## **ZIMBABWE: WILL UNITY PREVAIL?**

**With Thabitha Khumalo MP**

### **Report**

On 15th September 2008 the 'Global Political Agreement' was signed in Zimbabwe; it was seen as an historic power-sharing deal paving the way for the establishment of an inclusive government between ZANU-PF and the 2 factions of the MDC. Negotiations faltered when the MDC accused Mugabe's party of an unequal distribution of powerful ministries. A final deal was reached in January and Morgan Tsvangirai was sworn in as Prime Minister on 11th February. Despite Tsvangirai's demand for political prisoners to be released, more than 30 human rights activists and members of the MDC remain in jail.

Thabitha Khumalo MP is a Zimbabwean trade union leader and recently elected Member of Parliament for the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in Bulawayo East. Since taking office she has been appointed as the Deputy Secretary for Information and Publicity and most importantly, Thabitha currently sits on the Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee (JOMIC). Below is a synopsis of the points that Thabitha covered in her presentation and ensuing questions.

A moment's silence was held in respect to the late Susan Tsvangirai.

### **Latest situation**

There is a sense of both hope and caution presently in Zimbabwe. Hope that the unity government will prevail and caution that those actors who have been responsible for overseeing the decline of the Zimbabwean economic, political and humanitarian situation are still in positions of power.

A recent development has been the provision to civil servants, teachers and other public sector employees of \$100 USD for their salary. While the Finance Minister, Tendai Biti is gaining the credit for this move, there is no incoming fund to pay for the \$100 salaries on a sustained basis and it is uncertain where the money will come from for the coming months. Other workers are still being paid in Zimbabwe dollars which have literally no worth in Zimbabwe any longer. The benefit of the dollarisation of the economy is that shops now have goods to sell.

Unemployment is at 94%, it may well rise to 95/96% within the coming months. The situation facing white farmers is again critical with over 50 new farms having been taken in the last month; this land needs to be utilized for food production. Land is needed for production and job creation, and therefore, the idea that everyone has a right to a piece of land is potentially unsustainable. ZANU-PF have been using labour-intensive farming but workers are paid only in goods not in money.

There are still a number of political prisoners who have not been released. Jestina Mukoko, the Director of Zimbabwe Peace Project has been released but is currently fighting for her life in hospital. Roy Bennett, the MDC-T MP, remains in jail<sup>1</sup>. It has been reported that the head of the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) was involved in the Roy Bennett arrest and lied directly about where he was at the time.

### **Unity government**

MDC-T made an active decision that it is impossible to influence big changes (e.g constitutional, setting new election dates) from outside positions of power. For this reason they are trying to make the most of the unity government. It is accepted that at times they have had to compromise and negotiate on their values but have maintained integrity and transparency where possible.

MDC-T has been allocated all the social ministries in a bid to improve the social situation for the Zimbabwean people. It was also down to the SADC that the opposition party were given only social ministries. ZANU-PF still maintains many of the powerful ministries including Foreign Affairs. The government is in desperate need for funds in order to make the social ministries work and function. Tendai Biti has appealed to SADC Finance Ministers for support and will also be negotiating with donor countries and institutions for their increased support.

The objective of the MDC is to make an immediate improvement to people's lives as well as continue to take advantage of the space being afforded by relative political stability. They will need to clean out the voters roll in order that when the constitution is re-written and agreed upon fair and representative elections can occur with international monitors. This could take place in 2-3 years.

### **JOMIC**

[JOMIC is the Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee which assesses and ensures the implementation, in letter and spirit, of the Global Political Agreement.]

The biggest problem for JOMIC is a complete lack of funding; they do not even have transport expenses to carry out their work. JOMIC have not been able to send any reports to SADC as yet although they do have the authority due to lack of resources.

There have already been breaches of the MoU which include the number of Ministers appointed and the process of selection of Permanent Secretaries. It was suggested that nothing would be done by SADC about these blatant breaches of the power-sharing agreement.

Some members of the Committee have been trying to use JOMIC as a negotiating table rather than carrying out its mandate as a monitoring Committee. In particular, the question of an amnesty for ZANU-Pf perpetrators of human rights abuses has been raised in JOMIC's discussions. However, this would only ever be a decision for 'the Principles' (the party leaders) and it could not be taken at JOMIC. It was also suggested that MDC would never support such a move to give across the board impunity to criminals.

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<sup>1</sup> Roy Bennett was released on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2009.