

## **COSATU demands SADC backs democracy in Zimbabwe**

The Congress of South African Trade Unions is alarmed at reports that the talks to form a new government in Zimbabwe are on the brink of collapse.

It is now nearly ten months since the people went to the polls on 29 March 2008, when - despite huge levels of intimidation and attempts to rig the election – they voted for a government led by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

Yet the ZANU-PF party that lost that election remains in power and is clearly refusing to agree to any new government that reduces that power. It remains in control of the army and police, who have been ruthlessly abducting and torturing trade unionists, MDC members, NGO activists and anyone they regard as their political opponents.

The blame for this situation lies squarely with the leadership of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) who continue to treat the loser, ZANU-PF leader Robert Mugabe, as a bona-fide 'President', despite having lost the elections. His 'victory' in the 'Presidential election' on 27 June 2008, was condemned by everyone, including SADC's own and the African Union's observer missions, as unfree and unfair.

The new government that ZANU-PF is demanding would entrench the election losers in power while giving a purely ceremonial role to the winners. It is pure window-dressing. The MDC is quite right to reject such a government. Yet SADC refuses to demand that the MDC must be given at least an equal share of power, and thus gives Mugabe the confidence to refuse to compromise.

SADC leaders also gave credibility to the ZANU-PF lie that the MDC, trade unions and NGOs were agents of Western imperialist forces. It is precisely because of this stance which informs the SADC and their mediators' political approach, which Mugabe has used to brutally stay in power despite having been rejected by his people.

It is symptomatic of their failure that SADC appointed King Mswati III chair the SADC Organ Troika (for peace and security), which is principally responsible for the defence and promotion of democracy in the region, including trying to resolve the crisis in Zimbabwe. How can this absolute monarch be capable of promoting democracy in Zimbabwe, when he is brutally crushing the democratic opposition in his own kingdom?

Meanwhile the people of Zimbabwe are being engulfed in a humanitarian catastrophe. Workers are not getting paid; shops are running out of food. The economy is at a standstill. Thousands are flooding out of the country, where a growing number are reduced to begging in the streets as the only way to feed themselves and their families.

Yet Grace Mugabe can spend trillions of Zim dollars on a shopping spree in Hong Kong. She even allegedly severely assaulted a photographer who was taking pictures of her at the shopping centre.

Worst of all is the health disaster. The cholera epidemic, which is now rapidly spreading into neighbouring countries, is just one serious outbreak. Physicians for Human Rights have also identified an outbreak of anthrax, worsening HIV/Aids and TB infections, maternal mortality and morbidity, malnutrition and vitamin deficiency.

With no government in place the nightmare for the Zimbabwean people can only get worse.

COSATU welcomes the convening of a SADC Summit meeting on Monday and demands that the Southern African leaders give the kind of leadership which they have failed to provide so far. They must stop treating Mugabe as a legitimate head of state and insist that either any new government reflects the will of the people as expressed on 29 March, or that fresh elections be held, under international supervision.

COSATU will be stepping up its campaign of solidarity with the people of Zimbabwe in the coming weeks.

Tuesday, 20 January 2009