

Zimbabwe: Recovery and rehabilitation

Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions

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It is now more than a year since the signing of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) between the Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) (ZANU PF) and the two formations of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). At the inception of the inclusive government, as some would prefer to call it, the people of Zimbabwe had so much hope that things would change for the better.

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) has always made known its position with regards the MDC forming a coalition government with ZANU PF. The ZCTU has not minced its words – the coalition is a difficult arrangement to make work given the fact that the parties' ideology is worlds apart and that there is simply no trust amongst the parties.

As 2010 gets underway the ZCTU believes the euphoria that characterized the past year is wearing off leaving the majority of people somewhat uncertain about the future. The country's stores are full and people can buy any stuff they want but very little has changed on the ground. The majority of the country's workforce has to make do with an average monthly income of \$150 against a breadbasket of \$500 in a country where unemployment levels have reached 90 percent.

But despite this transitional arrangement, there are a number of outstanding issues in the GPA which ZANU PF is refusing to implement. These are, for example:

- Refusal to share executive powers with Morgan Tsvangirai-the Prime Minister (PM)
- Refusal to swear-in MDC Provincial Governors
- Refusal to Swear in Roy Bennet (MDC Treasury General) as Deputy Minister of Agriculture
- Continued Farm invasions
- Refusal to reform the state media
- Refusal to reform the security services
- Refusing the PM to chair cabinet, among others

It is quite a tricky and unpredictable situation that Zimbabweans find themselves in. Given the fact that human and trade union rights violations continue unabated, one would have expected the new government to move in quickly to rectify the situation.

One of the most unfortunate circumstances that Zimbabweans face is that the GPA legitimized institutions of oppression that had been operating under the Robert Mugabe regime. Terms for the reform of institutions like the police and security agencies are entrenched in the GPA, but nothing tangible has happened in the last year. The police force, army, the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) and the youth militias which were previously used to contain any forms of dissent still remain intact and partisan.

The people of Zimbabwe find it particularly difficult to move on when such institutions remain in place. The fact that stares them in the face is that there are no guarantees and just by the tick of a second they may find themselves in the situation they were prior to the June 27 2008 elections when an orgy of violence was unleashed on innocent unarmed citizens. The people who were at the centre of power during this period of terror continue to hold on to their posts. These include Ministers, Members of Parliament, Permanent Secretaries of Ministries, chiefs of police, the army, air force and the CIO.

Ministries that were inherited from ZANU PF by MDC Ministers are fraught with bureaucracy and still remain partisan, with little or no change in their operations. Farm invasions have continued with a deafening silence from the principals of the GPA on the exercise that has become synonymous with violence. This is but one of the many examples that Mugabe still has the power to do what he wants in government considering that he is using the same bureaucracy that aided him, a bureaucracy that has everything to protect on behalf of Mugabe.

The fact that the farm invasions coupled with minimal rains and lack of farming inputs such as fertilizers and seeds, have threatened and continue to have a negative effect on the country's food security cannot be overemphasized. More than 1 500 farm workers were displaced in 2009 with some losing their entire belongings to rogue veterans of the liberation struggle. It will take a few years to get seized farms working again as most of the land lies idle while the nation starves. The same tired excuse of Western imposed sanctions keeps being thrown back at the Zimbabweans as the main reason for their suffering. If the lack of political will to bring to finality the land issue and stop any new invasions continues, the cycle of hunger will also continue.

The question that one might ask at this stage is whether or not Zimbabwe is ready for elections – the answer is an emphatic NO. The conditions for free and fair elections have just not been created. Talk of continued animosity even between the country's leadership and general polarization along political lines of the people. There seems to be pressure from the Southern African region for the country to go for early elections because, it might seem, the region is just tired of the political impasse. Even Mugabe has hinted on an early election possibly a year from now in 2011 but with little or no reform having taken place especially of those institutions that were used to suppress the people, this is just not possible at all. ZANU PF's election stealing machinery remains strong and alive and no sane party will agree to go for elections under prevailing conditions.

The much touted constitution making process has ground to a halt and a myriad of reasons have been put forward for this. The ZCTU was labelled a spoiler when it opposed the process and advocated for an independent person to lead the process. The process is now Executive led as the Committee that oversees this now reports to the three leaders of political parties. Chaos is abound as ZANU PF has also launched its outreach programme to its 'members' but we all know what this means. Harassment has already started and people in rural areas are being told what to demand in the new constitution. The ZCTU campaign on the constitution has mainly been focussed on educating its members on what a Constitution is, and what is expected of each and every citizen during such an important exercise.

No one knows for how long this defective process will be stalled. It then throws another dimension to this whole debate – the Members of Parliament, the President, the Senators will go for a full term and the earliest Zimbabweans might see an election might be 2013. With the political leadership playing hide and seek with each other, this is a possibility.

In all these efforts to try and get Zimbabwe working again, the international community has continued to play an integral part. The ZCTU believes that it is difficult to entrust any funds to 'government' at the moment. In meetings or at various forums with the international community the advice of labour has been – do not throw your money into treasury. Instead the international community can pick specific areas that they want to assist in and the money goes straight there, and not into treasury. For example, cooperating partners might want to assist in provision of clean water, so instead of sending money for the procurement of chemicals for this exercise, the chemicals might be bought directly from suppliers.

The international community may provide support in terms of funding but there is also need to domesticate our solutions. Zimbabwe is a very rich country littered with gold, diamonds, platinum etc. If for example, diamond mining was done according to book and proceeds were to go to the State, Zimbabwe would come out of its economic because the country is losing more than US\$50 million per week through smuggling of gold and diamonds from Chiadzwa that lies 90 km south west of Mutare. If the smuggling was stopped and the money put to good use reviving the economy – Zimbabwe would be up and about in not time at all.

Zimbabwe is in a delicate transition that seeks to move the country from political and economic meltdown to stabilization. But this is only a transition, it can go wrong at any time and throw the country back into the throes of political and economic crisis. Zimbabwe remains a troubled country until there is a new democratic constitution followed by credible elections that are free and fair. We are trying to rebuild – but how do we do that when we have to always or constantly look over our shoulders for fear of being stabbed in the back? The future of the people of Zimbabwe currently hangs on the word 'IF' but we cannot go on like this, people need closure, people need to find finality and start rebuilding in earnest.