

ZCTU and COSATU statement on crisis in Zimbabwe

Thursday, 29th January, 2009

The General Secretary of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, Comrade Wellington Chibebe, is in South Africa. He took the opportunity to brief the COSATU National Office Bearers on the prevailing economic and political situation in Zimbabwe. Arising out of these discussions, the statement below was issued:

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions and the Congress of South African Trade Unions are deeply concerned at the deteriorating human crisis in Zimbabwe and the failure to install a government with a democratic mandate from the people of the country.

We warned against this imminent catastrophe many years ago and our political leadership in SADC and African Union ignored us. Today the chickens have come home to roost. The suffering that the Zimbabwean people are going through can no longer be adequately articulated through words.

The political leadership of SADC and AU must take full responsibility for this human tragedy. It is they who consistently refused to act. It is they who chose to nurse Robert Mugabe and refused to be guarantors of democracy, in blatant disregard of their own protocols and policies such as the SADC guidelines on elections. It is they who allowed Mugabe a free reign to terrorise and murder the citizens of his country.

The ZCTU, with COSATU's support, is still demanding a Neutral Transitional Authority, whose sole mandate will be to organise free and fair elections under international supervision.

Any 'unity' government that rewards those who lost an election is setting a very dangerous precedent.

The fundamental problem of the 15 September 2008 agreement between the ZANU-PF and MDC, which was facilitated by President Thabo Mbeki on behalf of SADC, is that it seeks to make the loser of the elections a winner and the winner a loser.

We have reluctantly agreed to support the principle of a unity government but only as an interim government whose main responsibility will be to create conditions for the holding of truly free and fair elections as soon as possible. It is our strong view that there can be no permanent solution without an election. The will of the people must be sovereign.

The SADC and AU leaders have yet again failed the people, by continuing to treat Mugabe as a legitimate head of state, despite being rejected by the majority of his citizens in the 29 March 2008 elections. SADC even allow him to remain in the Summit meeting after Morgan Tsvangirai had been asked to leave, so that he could be a judge in his own case.

Both federations fully sympathise with the Movement for Democratic Change's reluctance to endorse the resolution of the SADC Summit Meeting on 26-27 January 2009 in Pretoria, despite the huge pressure the Heads of State are exerting on them to accept it, aided by some of the media who are suggesting that "both parties are equally to blame" for the impasse.

The MDC is surely right to object to the attempt to railroad them into a potential political trap, in which their leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, is a purely symbolic figure, to serve as window-dressing for a ZANU-PF government to gain international recognition and acceptance.

SADC's proposed government of national unity (GNU) leaves most power in the hands of the defeated President Mugabe and his party who lost the elections on 29 March 2008.

The 'preconditions', which the MDC is asking for, are essential to ensure that there is at least a genuine sharing of power in the new government. The MDC should make clear to the world that they are entirely justified in rejecting such an agreement.

The SADC proposals rely far too much on trusting Mugabe to honour the spirit of the agreement. History does not suggest that anyone should place such trust in this man. History is full of examples that show that anyone who trusts that Mugabe can keep the spirit and letter of any agreement does so in his/her own peril. We list below some of the reason why we are sympathetic to the stance adopted by the MDC thus far:

1. After the 1980 Lancaster House agreement it had been agreed that ZANU and ZAPU were to contest as one, under the banner of the Patriotic Front, with Nkomo as the leader. But Mugabe reneged and fought the elections separately.
2. Thereafter, ZAPU's Joshua Nkomo was appointed as Minister of Home Affairs in the 1980 GNU but was dismissed two years later by the then Prime Minister Mugabe. Then for the next five years Mugabe's government waged a campaign of terror in Matabeleland and the Midlands, allegedly to hunt down 120 'dissidents', in which 20 000 civilians died, a higher rate of casualties than the 50 000 who perished when Smith was 'hunting down' about 55 000 fighters in the liberation struggle, in the 14 years between 1966 and 1980.
3. Another act of bad faith was the state's confiscation of properties owned by demobilised ex-ZIPRA combatants, who had pooled resources to buy properties. The state has still not returned their properties to this day. Even an agreement that ZANU and ZAPU would abandon their party symbols, the cock and bull respectively, was never honoured and the cock is still displayed on the ZANU-PF HQ today.

To the Zimbabwean people this is the history that cannot be ignored because of pressure by SADC and AU for a government of unity to be formed.

Already the Interim 'President' has unilaterally appointed 10 ZANU-PF members as provincial governors, regardless of the level of support for them in the province. For the record the MDC (Tsvangirai) won 5 provinces one (1) was won by MDC (Mutambara) with ZANU-PF winning 4 provinces. Yet in the appointment of the governors Mugabe ignores the will of the people.

Other party members who lost their seats in the elections remain in government office after being appointed non-constituent MPs. The police are still under the control of ZANU-PF, abducting, detaining and torturing political opponents of the ruling elite.

There is still no guarantee that MDC ministers, including the Prime Minister will not be dismissed by the 'President' who, according to the agreement, can demand the Prime Minister reports regularly to him and dismiss him for 'incompetence'.

So the MDC is right to insist that any agreement is watertight. They will lose credibility if they put their names to a deal that perpetuates the rule of the party which lost the election, keeps control of the army and police in ZANU-PF hands and sees their ministers being cast aside a few years down the line.

Meanwhile the situation within the country gets worse and worse. Unemployment is still rising. Most goods are no longer being produced in the country, but are imported

from South Africa. Most Public servants turn up to work to use the office equipment but do no work.

The Zim\$ is no longer accepted at shops. Trade is conducted in US\$, SA Rands, Pula or bartered goods. Criminals are getting rich forging notes in these currencies. Workers have been demanding, and striking for, payment of their wages in US\$.

Emigration into all the neighbouring countries is soaring. Schools have remained closed for a year, hospitals also remain closed, cholera has now killed 3000 people and other diseases are rampant and rapidly spilling across Zimbabwe's borders. It is a complete tragedy.

COSATU will be intensifying its solidarity campaign, with an already planned Southern African civil society conference, demonstrations and pickets on Zimbabwe.