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NAME: FARAI MAGUWU

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Supervisor

The role of Civil Society in building peace in Zimbabwe: Focus on the church

Although Zimbabwe's political crises are largely and/or entirely political, leaders speaking from both sides of the political divide are appealing to civil society to help build bridges in the strife torn Zimbabwe. An estimated 3,5 million Zimbabweans are said to have fled the country to become either economic or political refugees in the region or beyond whilst the remaining population is unstable due to the deepening socio-economic challenges confronting the country. Inflation in the country has hit a world record of above 1200% as the International Monetary Fund predicts that Zimbabwe's inflation will reach 4 200% in 2007.¹ Meanwhile the government-controlled newspaper, *The Herald*, reported that Zimbabwe's unemployment rate had reached 80% as of October 2006.²

Usually such political problems are left to politicians to solve, but with the emergence of a vibrant civil society since the late 1990s, civic organizations have now taken center stage in building peace in the badly divided Southern African

nation. This paper takes a critical examination of the role that the church can play in building peace in Zimbabwe. The paper also looks at the challenges and opportunities that exist and offer some recommendations that can help church leaders in their peace building initiatives in Zimbabwe. First we define civil society and its role and then discuss the church initiative as a civic response to the national crisis.

Defining Civil Society

Civic society is defined from different angles by different authors and institutions. According to the London School of Economics Center for Civil Society,¹ the term civil society

....refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundary between state, civil society, family and market and are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trade unions, self help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups

The British Scholar, Gordon White defines civil society as 'an intermediate associational realm between state and family, populated by organizations which are separate from the state, enjoy autonomy in relation to and are formed voluntarily by members of the society to protect or extend their interests and values'.² Carathers also posited that 'there is a fair amount of consensus around a view of civil society that excludes private business and the formal political sector (what some call political society) but is otherwise fairly inclusive'³

¹ London School of Economics and Political Science, 2004, Centre for Civil Society, What is Civil Society, p1

² White, G., 1994, Civil Society, Democratisation and Development (1): Clearing the Analytical Ground, Democratisation 1, no. 3, p54

³ Carathers, T., 1999, Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, p65

Carathers definition is more precise because not only does it define civil society, but it also mentions what civil society is not. The definition excludes the state and political parties from civil society.

The Labor Law Talk Dictionary defines civil society or civil institutions as 'the total of civic and social organizations or institutions that form the bedrock of a functioning democracy', adding that, 'civil society groups advocate and take action primarily for social action and public interest'.⁴

In this paper civil society shall refer to the totality of social organizations or institutions that exist between the state and the family. Political parties shall fall outside the arena of civil society. Civil society shall be viewed as organizations that share common interests and values and work for the promotion of better living standards for all people. Civil institutions are both local and international, transcending national boundaries and geographic zones.

The Challenge

The end of the 20th century marked a tipping point in the socio-economic life of Zimbabwe and its relations with other nations. The country entered a dark phase where it has not managed to evolve from for the past six years. The economy of Zimbabwe was in a steady decline since the implementation of the Structural Adjustment program. The economy did not perform well since the introduction of ESAP. For example, the economy grew at an average of 1% in real terms during the ESAP period (1991-1995) compared to 4% (1985-1990)⁵. By the end of the 1990s the economic performance of Zimbabwe was already over the hill as nearly all things were falling apart, ranging from the education sector, health delivery system, the agricultural sector etc.

⁴ www.dictionary.laborlawtalk.com

⁵ Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative, 2001 in collaboration with the Department of Economics, University of Zimbabwe, p4

In 1998 the prices of basic commodities began to soar prompting food riots that left 8 people dead. The government came under severe criticism from human rights watchdogs for its excessive use of force: 'indeed the whole nation was shocked by the food riots. Not just by the rioting of ordinary citizens, but also by the violence of the state's response. Eight deaths, unaccounted injuries, thousands of people being arrested and detained made an enduring impression on the nation.'⁶

In 1999 there were signs that the economic conflict would soon spill into a political conflict. The economy was showing signs of collapse. This was triggered by two very serious decisions made by President Mugabe. In August 1997 President Mugabe came under intense pressure to pay gratuities to the former fighters who fought in the war of liberation that brought him to power. They demonstrated against him at the Heroes Acre, forcing him to pay them a total of 4 billion dollars in the form of gratuities and pensions. This money was not budgeted for forcing the monetary authorities to print notes to quell the disturbances.

About the same time President Mugabe announced that his government was going to seize 1500 of the productive farms in Zimbabwe for resettlement. This unsettled investors who started fleeing with their movable assets for fear of acquisition by the government. This was followed by the "Black Friday" of November 14, 1997, which saw a record fall in the local currency and an accompanying exit of investors from the stock market. The collapse was followed by price increases triggering further food riots in the country. University students' demonstrations against the rising cost of living were met with severe police brutality. The government found itself constantly using heavy force to deal with unarmed civilians. This caused animosity between state security agents and the members of the public.

⁶ Amani Trust report on the Zimbabwe food riots, 1998

As the economy was apparently heading to a near comatose disaster, President Mugabe made another unpopular decision of engaging Zimbabwe in the Democratic Republic of Congo war. 'Mugabe dispatched thousands of Zimbabwean soldiers -----12,000 at the end----on a costly military adventure without consulting either Parliament or his Cabinet'.⁷ The war is estimated to have cost Zimbabwe 1 million pounds a day for a period of three years. The war further portrayed Mugabe as a leader who does not have the welfare of his people at heart. Many civic groups denounced the war, calling upon the government to invest its little resources on its citizens and not on a foreign war they were unlikely to win.

The DRC war continued until the turn of the century. In 1999, Zimbabweans began to talk openly about the need for finding an alternative to the ZANU PF government. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) was a vocal and by far the most organized social group in Zimbabwe. Its leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, was the most known critic of the Mugabe regime and well admired for his bravery in articulating the welfare of the workers. Consequently, in September 1999, a labor backed opposition political party was formed, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) with Morgan Tsvangirai as its founding President.

The groundwork for effective opposition politics in Zimbabwe was laid through the formation of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) in 1997. The NCA is a pro-democracy organization whose membership comprises both institutional and individual members. The former includes scores of civic society organizations like the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, religious organizations like the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, Human Rights Advocacy Groups such as Zimrights, women's groups like the Women's Coalition, and the Zimbabwe National Students Union.

⁷ Nyarota, G, 2004, Zimbabwe Country Report, Global Integrity

Meanwhile, the National Constitutional Assembly had gathered momentum by 1999 and was strongly agitating for a new people driven constitution with growing support from a number of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) who believed in the idea that a new people driven constitution is the starting point for the democratization process in Zimbabwe. At first the NCA and the MDC appeared to be very close, with the MDC leaders first having been NCA leaders.

Due to pressure from the NCA and other civic organizations, the government reluctantly agreed to set in motion a constitutional process to draft a new constitution to replace the Lancaster House Constitution. The government sponsored the Constitutional Commission whilst the NCA pursued a parallel process. A referendum was conducted in February 2000 and the people overwhelmingly voted against the government's draft constitution. The referendum was held four months before the general elections in June 2000. The result of the referendum was seen by many as a political barometer that showed that in the event of an election the ruling ZANU PF would lose to the opposition MDC.

Shortly after the elections the veterans of the country's liberation war invaded white owned commercial farms and seized the farms violently. The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum reported that:

War veterans and ZANU PF supporters are alleged to have compiled hit lists targeting farmers, opposition party candidates, and activists and civil servants, especially teachers...in addition, pro-government militias, propagandists and hired thugs have intensified their assaults of political opponents... at all night rallies and liberation war-style kangaroo courts set up at invaded farms. The new wave has cowed thousands into submission and forced some to flee to towns and cities for safety and security.⁸

In 2002 **NEAR Zimbabwe Campaign** reported that since 2000 a total of 170 people had been killed in state-sponsored violence, adding that Zimbabwe has one of the highest torture rates in the world, criminal corruption, endemic state

⁸ Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, 19 May 2000

violence and systematic destruction of the rule of law.⁹ At about this time investors began fleeing Zimbabwe, companies began closing down and relocating to neighboring countries and farmers began to leave Zimbabwe in hordes.

As the political crisis translated into economic quagmire the government began to accuse the former colonial power Britain of trying to re-colonise the country. The government went on a diplomatic offensive on Britain, calling on the former colonial power to pay for the acquired farms in honor of the promise made at the Lancaster House Constitutional Conference. Britain on the other hand claimed that it had given the Zimbabwe government a lot of money to purchase farms for resettlement but the money was misused by the ZANU PF government. So intense was the fallout since the turn of the millennium such that the 2000 general election was held under the banner 'Zimbabwe will never be a colony again'. During the campaign period leading to the 2002 presidential elections ZANU PF supporters were told to defend their country from falling back into the hands of Britain by voting ZANU PF. ZANU PF dubbed the 2005 general election the "Anti-Blair election."

Due to continued political crisis and a depressing human rights record Zimbabwe was suspended from the Commonwealth, and targeted sanctions were imposed on the ruling elite by the European Union, United States and Canada. The government blames the opposition MDC for putting the country under sanctions, which they claim, hurt the ordinary people more than the government officials. The MDC on the other hand accuses the government of dragging the country to ruin through its appalling human rights record, corruption, vote-rigging and bad policies. The stand off has stood the test of six solid years as the economy continues to decline.

The position of civil society in Zimbabwe

⁹ NEAR Zimbabwe Campaign, 2002: Zimbabwe on the brink, www.nearinternational.org/Zimbabwe

The NCA was formed by a number of civic organizations that wanted 'change' in Zimbabwe. These organizations numbered about 200 at the height of the demand for a new constitution in 2000. Since the NCA was some sort of a forerunner to the MDC, it follows that the MDC was formed by civic organizations demanding change in Zimbabwe. Sithole observed that 'dozens of MDC leaders, had once served in the NCA, including Morgan Tsvangirai, the chairman of the NCA's National Taskforce (who became the president of the MDC) and the NCA's official spokesman, Professor Welshmen Ncube (who became the party's spokesman).¹⁰

Both the NCA and the MDC received generous support from well-funded civic organizations, businesses and commercial farmers in Zimbabwe. This gave strength to both the NCA and the MDC. In response the government started accusing civic organizations that supported the MDC and the NCA of carrying out a foreign agenda of effecting 'regime change' in Zimbabwe. The NGO bill was drafted and is just waiting presidential ascend before it becomes law. If Mugabe signs it into law it means civic organizations may be required to re-apply for registration and many may be denied registration on political grounds.

Human rights organizations such as the Zimbabwe Law Society and the Zimbabwe lawyers for Human Rights have been engaged in a bitter conflict with the government over the passage of draconian laws and the general decline in the rule of law. Such organizations may find it difficult to register. Consequently, most civic organizations have changed their approach from confrontation to cooperation with the government, for fear of being de-registered. This approach has its pros and cons. Furthermore, the government has also 'created' its own counter civic organizations to neutralize civic organizations that are too critical of its policies. The Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Unions was formed with the support of the government to counter the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions.

¹⁰ Sithole, M, 2001, Fighting Authoritarianism in Zimbabwe: National Endowment for Democracy and the Johns Hopkins University Press, Journal For Democracy, 12.1 (2001) 160-169

The Zimbabwe Congress of Student Unions was also formed with the backing of the ruling ZANU PF to counter the Zimbabwe National Students Union.

The same rift has occurred in faith-based organizations where a group of church leaders comprising leaders from the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe and the Catholic Bishop's Conference have had private meetings with President Mugabe whilst another group of powerful religious leaders prefers not to engage in any talks with Mugabe. The group engaged in dialogue with Mugabe has since launched its strategic document entitled "National Vision." The group intends to submit its document to Mugabe, indicating that they want the 82-year-old leader to play a central role in solving the national problem.

On the other hand another group of young and elderly church leaders, The Zimbabwe Christian Alliance, is charting its own course that appears confrontational to the government. Under the leadership of Bishop Levee Kudenge, the group said it is preparing a document: Democracy and Social Charter that will draw a roadmap out of the country's crisis. Prior to this high profile split in the church leadership only one prominent church leader has constantly and publicly blamed the government for its bad human rights record and worsening living standards, the Catholic Archbishop of Bulawayo, Pius Ncube. Archbishop Pius Ncube said Mugabe is using divide and rule tactics to silence opposition from the clergy.¹¹ In the next chapter we focus on the history of the church in promoting peace and good governance in Zimbabwe.

¹¹ The Zimbabwe Situation, 7 June 2006

Chapter 2

2.1 The church in peace and good governance in Zimbabwe.

In the 1980s the government of Zimbabwe sent troops to Matebeleland and Midlands provinces ostensibly to quell dissident activities that had surfaced after the liberation war in that part of the country, home to the official opposition back then, PF ZAPU. However, the exercise turned out to be some form of ethnic cleansing as it claimed between 20 000 and 40 000 civilians who had nothing to do with the dissident activities. If anything they were victims of both the government troops and the dissidents. The report of the Chihambakwe Commission, set up by the government to investigate details of the genocide in January 1984 is still sealed in the office of the president, the then Prime Minister, Robert Mugabe. In November 1985, Minister of Defence, Emerson Mnangagwa announced that the report would not be published.¹²

In response to this the CCJP send its own personnel to conduct interviews and collect information from victims and survivors of the genocide. This culminated in the publication of a comprehensive report: *Breaking The Silence: Building True Peace*. In the report the commission argued that they were not trying to open fresh wounds as the government was accusing them of doing, but rather they were trying to heal the covered wounds that the government pretended did not exist. They argued that if the wound can be reopened afresh then it was never healed. True peace, they argued, is based on the premise of truth telling and forgiveness. The Catholic report is the major reference whenever the genocide is mentioned. Meanwhile, the CCJP continued to voice their concern about human rights violations through out the 1990s.

¹² *Breaking The Silence: Building True Peace: A Report on the Disturbances in Matebeleland and the Midlands 1980 – 1989*, Legal Resources Foundation, 1987, Harare, p8

In the 1990s Zimbabwe lacked genuine opposition to the ZANU PF rule and at one time the ruling party debated about the creation of a legislated one party state. During that period the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) offered a critical voice to the state, criticizing a one party state as a violation of human rights.¹³ The CCJP disseminated information that denounced one party state and argued that genuine peace will come when people are allowed to choose leaders freely.

The Zimbabwe Council of Churches also publicly opposed the proposed legislation leading to the government setting aside the one party agenda. However, despite the fierce resistance to the one-party state by the two faith-based organizations, religious organizations have always preferred a sound relationship with the government as opposed to the confrontational one. Many religious leaders fear that openly criticizing the government would mean losing a lot that the government can offer. As a result when challenged to take a stance on critical issues or controversial matters affecting the ordinary man they prefer to call themselves 'apolitical'. Nevertheless, the church in Zimbabwe has been in every democratic step that civil society has taken.

In 1996 the Ecumenical Support Services (ESS) started a debate on the effects of the structural Adjustment Program. Christian leaders from South Africa, Zambia and Botswana met at a three-day workshop in Harare. Discussions were around three main areas of concern: Governance, Economic Justice and Gender and Youth. The process culminated in the writing of the Zimbabwe Kairos Document: A call to prophetic action. The document was an eye opener as it articulated well the challenges facing Zimbabwe at that time. It opened discussion about a better Zimbabwe. Although the ESS had very little grassroots structures it managed to hold meetings and workshops across the country to discuss a peaceful transformation of Zimbabwe into a prosperous and

¹³ Sithole, M, 1997, op cit

democratic country. Through ESS efforts Zimbabweans started discussing openly their future with intellectuals and practitioners in various disciplines.

The following year, 1997, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches initiated the National Constitutional Assembly, which became the umbrella body demanding a new, people driven and democratic constitution for Zimbabwe. The NCA caused the government's first post independence defeat in a referendum that set the stage for a violent election in June 2000. However, when the NCA gained credibility and muscle to challenge the government, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches withdrew from the constitutional body. The relationship between the church and state has been to a large degree collaborative although the church occasionally helps and capacitates civil society to confront the state on fundamental issues of basic human needs and human rights.

This puts the church in a better position to diplomatically engage government, opposition political parties and civil society for dialogue. Furthermore, the majorities of Zimbabweans are Christians and have high regard for religious leaders. During the liberation war (1963-1979), Mugabe was quoted in an interview as saying: 'we appeal to them {churches} to allow us to politicize the people under their control because we believe that everybody must be mobilized so that the total commitment of our people can be achieved'.¹⁴

The encouraging fact is that church leaders in Zimbabwe have begun to take action about the national crisis, even though in different forms. As noted above, a two way process is being pursued by religious leaders to solve Zimbabwe's political enigma. Whilst others have been calling on the religious leaders to speak with one voice, here we argue that both approaches are very crucial at the moment. Putting the government too far or too close will not solve the problem either, hence it is necessary to have some diplomatically engaging the

¹⁴ UN Office for the coordination of humanitarian affairs, Zimbabwe: politics make strange church fellows June 2006, IRIN news.org

government whilst others make noise from without. However, both camps must remain focused lest they lose track of their objective.

Chapter 3

Collaborative approach

According to CollabWIKI collaboration occurs when two or more people interact and exchange knowledge in pursuit of a shared, collective, bounded goal.¹⁵ Here collaboration shall refer to positive engagement with the government through dialogue and negotiation.

This is the approach adopted by the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe and the Catholic Bishops Conference who have fused under the banner of Ecumenical Peace Initiative. This approach is the most attractive as it affords the clergyman the chance to advise the head of state directly and get to influence his decisions. They can diplomatically influence him and negotiate an end to political hostilities with the opposition. To their credit, the church leaders who believe talking to Mugabe in private can salvage the country from its economic demise, they held a National Day of Prayer on the 25th of June where Mugabe admitted to 'sins of commission and omission' and having 'not succeeded as we had wished'.¹⁶ At the well-attended prayer meeting Mugabe used a very unusual low tone in a conspicuous departure from his characteristic name-calling and hateful speeches.

Mugabe added, 'we can not do without each other as the church and the state...let the church come in and point out where there are short comings...'¹⁷ But the question is to what extend is Mugabe willing to listen to the voice from the church. At the same meeting Mugabe warned church leaders who mix religion with politics that they would face a 'vicious' reaction from his party. 'When the church leaders start being political, we regard them as political creatures and we

¹⁵ collab.blueoxen.net

¹⁶ BBC News Africa, 26 June 2006, www.news.bbc.co.uk

¹⁷ The Zimbabwe Situation, 26 June 2006, www.zimbabwesituation.com

are vicious in that area¹⁸, in apparent reference to the outspoken Bulawayo Catholic Archbishop, Pius Ncube

Mugabe's warning is the summary measure of the degree to which he can take criticism from church leaders. They must leave politics to politicians. Yet Mugabe is a politician and how can church leaders avoid politics when dealing with a politician? Or must they talk politics only when they praise him? But, how can a church leader keep quiet when politicians are violating human rights with impunity? How can they pretend not to know the political violence that traumatizes their membership? Shall they avoid talking about smooth transition of power when it's the most contentious issue in the country today? If they only tell him what he wants to hear then they have lost their saltiness and may as well embarrassing the church by regularly appearing on television promising much but delivering nothing.

President Mugabe has set limits to what the church leaders can say to him. This has given rise to praise singers such as the Anglican Bishop of Harare, Nolbert Kunonga, who once praised Mugabe as being more Christian than himself.¹⁹ Kunonga was sanctioned from visiting the USA for his support of Mugabe. Clerics such as Kunonga have lost credibility and are unlikely to advise the president objectively. The Anglican Bishop has also criticized the opposition and civic organizations critical to the government as being 'puppets of the west'.²⁰ Such a collaborative approach has not helped resolve the Zimbabwe crises, but rather has misled the President into believing that there is nothing wrong with his policies.

It therefore means a collaborative approach is very attractive but less fruitful for the Zimbabwean clergy. Since July 2003 the Leaders of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe and the Catholic Bishops

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ Worldwide Faith News archives, 4 April 2002, www.wfn.org

Conference have been holding separate meetings with Mugabe and Tsvangirai to start national dialogue but their efforts have not yielded any tangible fruits so far. Whilst Tsvangirai has been open to negotiation Mugabe has openly declined any talks with Tsvangirai. He even scoffs at such an idea:

"Today, we tell all those calling for such ill-conceived talks to please stop misdirecting their efforts. The rest of the world knows who must be spoken to. In case they do not, we tell them here at Heroes Acre that the man who needs to be spoken to in order to make him see reason resides at number 10 Downing Street (the official residence of the British Prime Minister)²¹

Mugabe's utterances were an embarrassment to church leaders who were optimistic that their efforts to foster dialogue between Mugabe and Tsvangirai were yielding results. It showed that whatever talks had been going on were not sufficient to convince Mugabe that he must work together with the official opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change. Instead, it appears that whilst Mugabe remained fixed in his opinion, some members of the clergy have shifted opinion from being fierce critics of Mugabe to becoming his loudest apologists.

The most notable is Bishop Trevor Manhanga who was once a firebrand critic of the Mugabe regime but has changed his stance in dramatic fashion. He is now bravely defending the government and at the same time fiercely attacking fellow clergymen who oppose government policies. Archbishop Ncube accused the clergy, who now seem to agree with the government, of receiving bribes from the government:

"There is no secret about the fact that some of the church leaders who embarrassed the church by praising Mugabe have got farms that they were given by the government, and that compromises them because they will never speak for the poor and downtrodden. A lot of our colleagues are actually working with ZANU PF to try and help the ruling party to boost its membership".²²

The clergymen who have chosen to collaborate with the government have either yielded nothing or have had their opinions turned in favor of the government.

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Nigerian Times, August 2005, www.nigeriantimes.blogspot.com

²² Political Affairs Magazine: Zimbabwe: Politics make strange bedfellows, www.politicalaffairs.net/3651/1/191

Collaboration is a plausible idea but must be worked out well lest it become a gesture of surrender and resignation. Those who go for it must be aware that they are dealing with politicians who can give anything to win critics to their side. Furthermore, church leaders who have preferred dialogue with the government have been ridiculed by members of the public as cowards and ZANU PF collaborators. They are accused of wasting time discussing with a regime that has no desire to change its policies whilst the nation starves. Rather, public interest is shifting towards the church leaders who are highly critical of the ZANU PF government.

In the next chapter we look at the other approach that is being pursued by religious leaders in Zimbabwe, that is confrontation.

The confrontational Approach

Confrontation here shall refer to a hostile disagreement between two actors or a discord resulting from a clash of ideas or opinions. It also refers to the act of publicly opposing each other due to divergence of views. From the part of churches it takes the form of supporting or engaging in demonstrations against government, protests, non-cooperation, accusations and counter-accusations, critical and hate speeches. On the part of government confrontation means the use of force to stop demonstrations, arrests, detention of clergy, accusations and counter-accusations, critical and hate speeches.

It must be pointed out that confrontation or collaboration is not a straightjacket approach belonging to a particular group of people. In some cases religious leaders have tried both and settled for the most convenient one, or the less demanding one. An example is Bishop Trevor Manhanga who at one time was the fiercest critic of President Robert Mugabe among the clergy. He was in 2003 lambasted alongside the Anglican Bishop of Manicaland, Sebastian Bakare by the Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs as “MDC activists wearing religious collars”.²³ On 13 February 2003 Bishop Manhanga was arrested in Borrowdale where he had been invited to speak at a Crisis Coalition public meeting whose theme was: “The Church: Resolving or Worsening the Zimbabwe Crisis”. Today Manhanga has abandoned the confrontational approach, choosing rather ‘dialogue’ with the President.

Church leaders who have used the confrontational approach have won the support of the people and earned a backlash from the government. The first individual critic from the clergy to voice his concern with the way the government is handling national issues is the Catholic Archbishop of Bulawayo, Pius Ncube who described President Mugabe as ‘the one big devil’ that ‘everybody is fed up

²³ The Zimbabwe Situation, 2 August 2003 www.zimbabwesituation.com

with'.²⁴ Mugabe, himself a self proclaimed devout Catholic, has also hailed insults at the outspoken Archbishop, calling him an 'unholy liar'.

Archbishop Ncube has had to endure a lot of attacks from the government for his stand on human rights and democracy. During the government's massacre of Ndebele people in the 1980s the Archbishop stood up to denounce the brutal killings that went on between 1982 and 1997. According to *news from Africa*, 'when Archbishop Ncube condemned the state terrorism that killed, maimed and displaced thousands of Ndebele people in Matebeleland in 1983, President Robert Mugabe labeled him a hypocrite and 'a Jeremiah' prophesying for the late Vice President Joshua Nkomo, a revered nationalist and leader of the Ndebele'.²⁵

The government has treated critical church leaders the same way it treats critical civic leaders. Its intolerance to critical church leaders was epitomized by the arrest in August of four leaders from the Christian Alliance following a leadership meeting of the grouping in Bulawayo. They were quizzed about their activities before being released without charge. This was a clear sign that the government would not take any open criticism from the church leaders. The arrests came barely a week after the Alliance organized the *Save Zimbabwe National Convention* at which the leaders of the two feuding factions of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change joined hands and pledged to work together to dislodge ZANU PF from power. Other opposition party members and several civic leaders in Zimbabwe also attended the meeting. The ruling ZANU PF and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe were invited but did not send representatives. The meeting received massive backing from civic leaders in Zimbabwe.

²⁴ Publius Pundit, 28 March 2005, Calls for a Peaceful Uprising Against Mugabe, www.publiuspundit.com

²⁵ News from Africa 2002, www.newsfromafrica.org

The government's reaction is expected and well predictable. It is apparent that the government has not been able to save the economy from its free fall triggered by bad policies. There is general fear of a popular uprising due to unprecedented suffering in the country. The government has tried to protect itself by introducing laws that take away people's freedoms such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA). These laws are meant to limit the publication of information that may further damage the government image and to ensure that people are incapacitated by oppressive rule so that they will not protest.

Lessons from South Africa

Whilst it is true that each struggle has its own forms and peculiarities, there are lessons to be learnt from others who went through similar experiences. There is a prominent shona proverb that says '*kugara nhaka huona dzevamwe*', meaning to practice inheritance you must learn from others'. Zimbabwe's southern neighbor, South Africa, is just emerging out of several decades of an intense racial conflict – apartheid. Church leaders played a pivotal role in destroying apartheid in South Africa. The reconstruction of South Africa also had a very clear and powerful religious tone, indicating the power and influence of the church in the lives of South Africans. Although the nation is still to realize positive peace (with economic justice) there is hope that South Africa will pull out of her problems if there is political will to do so.

When Bishop Desmond Tutu became the General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) in 1978 he became the most prominent preacher of liberation theology. The SACC represents millions of Christians of which 80% are blacks. The SACC values the principles of ecumenism and social responsibility,

putting much emphasis on justice and reconciliation. When the apartheid government banned ANC SACC became the voice of protest against the apartheid regime under Tutu's leadership. Tutu began advocating for the withdrawal of foreign investors from South Africa whilst at the same time propagating justice and racial reconciliation. In response to the escalation of violence in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Tutu began to diffuse the message of nonviolence in South Africa.

Summing up his theology on the role of the church in building peace in South Africa and the rest of Africa Tutu had this to say:

The church must align itself with the powerless, the marginalized and the voiceless. It must strive to be the voice of the voiceless to ensure that the cries of the poor are heard. It has the enormous responsibility of telling the truth, of identifying evil wherever it may be found, and of insisting that the government, any government, must be honest²⁶

During the difficult years that preceded the first democratic elections in South Africa held in 1994, Tutu regularly appealed to the South African Government, the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party for calm. He played possibly his greatest role in the transition process through the truth and reconciliation commission. He also took a leading role in the reconciliation of Christian churches, deeply divided by apartheid. Tutu represents many religious leaders in South Africa who stood up against apartheid. They spoke the truth during extremely difficult times.

Tutu united his work with that of other African Men of the Cloth fighting human rights abuses, corruption and poor governance. He was elected President of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) in 1987 and re-elected in 1992. As president of AACC he acknowledged the work that was being done by other clergy on the continent:

"Africa does not have a good track record on human rights and I am determined to see that the church does something about this. It is beginning to happen. Consider the role played by the

²⁶ Hendri J.C. 2001, Desmond Tutu's Message, Brill Academic Publishers, MI, USA, p35

churches in Kenya in the face of a hostile regime or the witness of the Roman Catholic Bishops in Malawi. A similar stand has been taken in Zaire. When an honest broker was needed in Benin to facilitate the transitional process, the political parties turned to the church. This constitutes a new opportunity for the church to regain its integrity and to promote the cause of justice and peace on this continent in a manner that has not been done since the beginning of the African independence process (in the sixties)"²⁷

In short, Bishop Tutu adopted a confrontational approach with a strict adherence to nonviolence. His message was based on the 'truth', which is anchored on religious beliefs and values. He did not engage the apartheid regime in negotiations for transition to majority rule. He preached to the world against what he saw as evil to such a point of calling for sanctions against the apartheid regime. Tutu's message found a ready audience who identified with his call for justice and peaceful coexistence. He was never misunderstood by the people he represented because his mission was not veiled or ambiguous.

To the black South Africans Tutu was the voice of the voiceless. He managed to make his religious message relevant to the needs of ordinary South Africans. He identified evil and preached against it. He convinced South Africans that a new South Africa was possible and to that end he labored. Consequently Tutu is still a unifying and stabilizing personality in South Africa, a man all races turn to for help in times of need, a man trusted for nothing but the truth.

Recommendations

Zimbabweans know too well the bold stance taken by Bishop Tutu against apartheid and his victory over it. They know that religious leaders can rise to the challenge and fight evil and win. As such they have ridiculed religious praise singers of Mugabe, challenging them to emulate the legendary Desmond Tutu. Church leaders who have resorted to collaborative tactics have done so at a great cost to their reputation. They have been called names and accused of hypocrisy. This does not mean Zimbabweans do not believe in dialogue, they do and have also been calling for some talks between ZANU PF and the opposition

²⁷ Tutu, *ibid*, p35

MDC. So why are the people rejecting efforts by the church leaders to bring the two main political parties to a round table?

Religious leaders who want to be involved in peace building must not be praise singers of President Mugabe. The former president of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, Bishop Nemapare of the African Methodist Church in Bulawayo is a well known supporter of ZANU PF and President Mugabe. After the meeting with Mugabe Bishop Nemapare and the ZCC secretary general Denson Mafinyane were captured on television making statements declaring their support for the ruling ZANU PF party. They were also seen laughing at derogatory comments made by Mugabe about the Catholic Archbishop of Bulawayo, Pius Ncube, who has criticized church collaboration with the government.²⁸

Secondly, church leaders representing unions or associations must seek mandate from their associations to embark on such a mission. At the leadership level of the church a lot of leaders did not know anything about the state house meeting with President Mugabe. To show their displeasure with the whole move of engaging Mugabe in closed door dialogue without their knowledge, members of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches voted its president, Bishop Nemapare out of office a week after the infamous National Day of Prayer. At the same biannual assembly the bishop tried unsuccessfully to contest for the positions of president, vice president, treasurer and committee member. Delegates kept snubbing him.

Bishop Nemapare's counterpart in the state house meeting with Mugabe, Bishop Trevor Manhanga of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, is also facing a media backlash and is likely to be replaced at the organization's annual general meeting before the end of the year. Already the two 'were summoned by Harare and Chitungwiza based pastors to explain who had mandated them to speak to Mugabe'.²⁹

²⁸ www.magicstatistics.com

²⁹ Foster Dongozi, The Zimbabwe Standard, 10 July 2006

Mugabe should not be taken as the solution to Zimbabwe's problems. Ordinary people in Zimbabwe view President Mugabe as part of the problem and yet the Bishops who met him present him as the solution to the crises. A lot of evidence shows that the crises in Zimbabwe are sparked by Mugabe's refusal to give up power and his destructive policies that scare away investors. Many doubt Mugabe's commitment to democracy as this may mean his imminent downfall. It is against this backdrop that the general public did not welcome dialogue with the president. Zimbabweans want a solution that reveals that Mugabe is presiding over a failed state and that emphasizes the need for a new Zimbabwe.

There was need to gauge public opinion on such an important matter. This would give the people a chance to give their opinions on what needs to be done. A vibrant, all-inclusive and well-organized public outreach was the instrument used by the National Constitutional Assembly to defeat the government in the first post-independence referendum in 2000. On the contrary, there was no consultation even within the hierarchy of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches. In some member churches both the pastor and the congregation knew nothing about the initiative. Their response is predictable: rejection of the whole process.

Perhaps the most important ethic violated here is trust. Mistrust develops where there is no communication. With the sudden u-turn of Bishop Manhanga from being a firebrand critic to becoming a soft negotiator with government, and his close association with Bishop Nemapare, a well-known supporter of Mugabe and ZANU PF, there was always reason for suspicion. To quell any rumors and allegations of hypocrisy, the Bishop should have explained his change of strategy and made the people see reason in it. With the trust he had built over the years, it is very unlikely that the public was going to ridicule him provided they could follow the process through. Manhanga chose the underground way and this left him separated from his followers of many years. Church leaders must always be transparent and clear about their actions.

But why must they be very clear and transparent in negotiations with the government? People in Zimbabwe are very suspicious of the government when it comes to negotiation. It is public feeling that the government does not negotiate in good faith. People have not forgotten the Unity Accord of 1987 that united ZANU PF and PF ZAPU to form ZANU PF. They feel the whole thing was simply the dissolution of PF ZAPU in the name of uniting the two political parties. ZANU PF remained ZANU PF but PF ZAPU disappeared after the negotiations. The PF ZAPU leader, Joshua Nkomo, was accused of betraying his followers by announcing the 'unity' without consulting them.

Thus negotiation with the government requires men and women of a strong character with sound negotiation skills. Some professional background in negotiation is necessary. The church is a robust institution with quality human resources that can be utilized in such a time like this. Pastors must prepare effectively before engaging in dialogue: they must map the conflict first, explore its dynamics and design negotiation strategies. They must seek such help from their members as well as from civic organizations involved in conflict resolution.

Confrontation may be ideologically the antithesis of collaboration but the two may work together to bring the desired change. The two are not incompatible. While answering his critics on non-violent confrontation Martin Luther argued that: "Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which had constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored."³⁰ Thus in deep-seated conflicts some tension may lead to dialogue. Those who collaborate may diplomatically change the government policies without the government feeling defeated or embarrassed and yet the force will be coming from the confrontation advocates.

³⁰ Luther, K, Martin 1963, Letter from the Birmingham Jail, University of Pennsylvania-African Studies Center

Confrontation is a call to dialogue and as such those who have access to state house must tell the government why some of them are confronting it through the media and public forums. Confrontation sets the agenda for dialogue. It is essential that pastors speak out loudly against human rights abuses and human suffering in Zimbabwe. This is the message that negotiators must take to the president.

Pastors must work together with civic organizations pressing the government for drastic reforms in Zimbabwe. Their efforts must not be isolated but rather a part of the broader movement against human rights abuses. They may have to team up with other prominent civic leaders and human rights defenders when they meet politicians. This will lessen the likelihood of suspicion from the public.

They must work with prominent African religious leaders known for defending human rights such as Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa. Tutu is well known for defending the weak and the voiceless and if his voice is added to the critical voice in Zimbabwe it will further highlight the gravity of the situation in Zimbabwe.

Before this paper was completed the National Vision Document was published under the title ***The Zimbabwe We Want: 'Towards a National Vision For Zimbabwe'***. Although the document is comprehensive in its articulation of the crises bedeviling Zimbabwe it does not clearly prescribe to the nation how the political enigma can be solved. The document talks about the need for democracy and ends there. There is a greater likelihood that the government will receive the document, complement the church for coming up with such a comprehensive document and continue with its destructive policies. The document is diplomatic in nature and was carefully drafted so as not to irritate the ruling ZANU PF.

This means more has to be done before the envisioned Zimbabwe can be a reality. The document talks about national reconciliation and a shared vision. But this can only take place when there is a legitimate government. For South Africa the first thing was the demolition of the illegitimate apartheid regime; then came the truth and reconciliation commission. How can people work together with a government they accuse of stealing their vote? How can two walk together unless they are agreed? There is need for the church to play a more central role in the conduct of elections and ensure that the mass populace has confidence in the country's electoral system and that there is legitimacy in government. Once the government is considered legitimate then Zimbabweans can start a serious dialogue on the way forward. Before that, talking of a national vision and reconciliation is putting the horse before the cart.

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