

ON SOLID GROUND

A Heal Zimbabwe Publication



On Solid Ground is a fortnight publication by Heal Zimbabwe Trust. This publication reports on the organization's work with grassroots communities towards the rehabilitation and reintegration of survivors, victims and perpetrators in communities affected by political violence. The Solid Ground is being Zimbabwean and this is what binds us together despite our diverging political, cultural and social ideologies, practices or affiliations. Heal Zimbabwe Trust therefore seeks to contribute to peace building and conflict transformation by filling the political, social and economic gaps resulting from politically motivated violence and to the broader national healing debate in Zimbabwe.

Editorial

Elections in Zimbabwe are most probably less than two months away, yet it is no secret that there are some outstanding issues that are still to be addressed. There were high incidents of violations recorded in 2008 therefore, Heal Zimbabwe Trust embarked on an exercise to collect, analyse and verify cases of politically related human rights violations that derail peace building and national healing initiatives in selected districts in the country. This was aimed at ensuring that necessary measures are taken by the Government to guarantee that a repeat of the 2008 political violence does not occur in 2013 since elections in Zimbabwe are synonymous with violence.

Political Violence in Zimbabwe – Could history be repeating itself?

Over the past 30 years of Zimbabwe's independence, elections in Zimbabwe have been plagued by political violence. The propensity for violence and impunity seems to be increasing with each election and this is reflected by the vicious cycle of incidents of violence that has plagued many rural communities. The many harrowing reports of violence prompted Heal Zimbabwe Trust (HZN) to carry out a survey in the political violence hotspots of Zaka, Buhera, Muzarabani, Gokwe and Murehwa. Most worryingly, this politically motivated violence has not known nor discriminated by age or gender. Instead, the violence has been targeted at all those suspected to be or are sym-

pathetic to then opposition parties especially Movement for Democratic Change (MDC T) human rights defenders, civil society activists and any Zimbabwean who has dared show any signs of dissent against Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) and its largely spy infiltrated state apparatus.

The results of the survey as well as HZT's weekly alert system, reveal that the main instigators of political violence can be classified into two, that is direct and indirect instigators. The direct instigators are those directly involved in perpetrating violence and these include disenchanted youth, some whom are from militia camps such as the infamous Border Gezi training camp. The youth mostly operated in areas such as Zaka, Muzarabani, Murehwa and Gokwe. Some politicians, members of the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), Criminal Investigations Department (CID), war veterans, soldiers and policemen can also be classified as direct instigators since reports from Buhera and Mutoko reveal that they were responsible for instigating violence. Conversely, indirect instigators of violence are those who are mainly involved in organising and funding the violence. These include the traditional leaders, some state security agents and political leaders who operate at various structural levels. It is important to note that some groups such as the police and army fall into both categories because they were at times involved in organising and instigating violence.

The HZT survey revealed that 20 000 people were harassed and almost 100 000 internally displaced during the 2008 political violence. A total of 16 400 cases were

recorded between January and June 2008 clearly showing how volatile the pre-election period was. The HZT survey revealed that the major incidents of violence associated with Zimbabwean elections are as follows:

Assault cases top the list of acts that were perpetrated. HZT survey findings reveal that cases of assaults constitute 90% of the cases of violence that were reported in 2008. There were 2 810 cases of assault reported between January and June 2008. The trends showed that the cases increased as the months progressed towards the run off. Zimbabwe Peace Project revealed that a total of 163 cases were recorded in January while 704 were recorded in May and 779 in June. However, from 2009 to date, HZT has observed a significant decline in the number of assault cases reported. This clearly shows a sharp decline in overt tactics but what is of concern are the more clandestine forms of violence such as intimidation and harassment. There is thus now a shift from physical to psychological violence. Therefore, there is still need for more action on the ground to ensure that the covert forms of violence are thwarted before they result in more pronounced acts of violence during the elections. This will help in realising political tolerance which will create a room for peaceful, free and fair elections.

Intimidation and torture were subjected to victims. Some were abducted and taken to the 'base camps' where they were tortured and left for dead. A total of 157 murders were reported between January and June 2008. In Buhera West, most of the victims of politically

The HZT alert is a weekly report on the general political environment with regards to the nature and scope of violence taking place in communities. The peace animators in communities in all 10 provinces of the country provide a weekly update on the general political environment.

motivated violence were the elderly who are above 51 years of age. The members of the police force were also reported to have been responsible for harassing individuals to the extent that some were maimed and women miscarried resulting in not more than physical scars, but emotional and mental trauma as well. Similarly in Mutoko, HZT findings revealed that members of the army were responsible for 70% of the violence. The HZT survey also revealed that in all the 10 provinces, intimidation currently tops the list of acts perpetrated in 2013. This may be due to the fact that there are constant calls for peace which have resulted in a shift from overt to clandestine forms of violations. MDC supporters in Shamva and Bindura reported that intimidation is usually high when there are rallies or community meetings. The recent visit to Mashonaland Central by Vice President Joyce Mujuru on 30 May 2013 resulted in the resurgence of intimidation and harassment by ZANU-PF youths. The threats were a result of the low turnout at the rally. There is need to continue encouraging communities to be tolerant and learn to co-exist with each other. A Bindura community member asserted that “...*For free and fair elections to be held, all political parties need to fully adopt the Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee (JOMIC) code of conduct...*”. Intimidation tactics are thus used as a tool to dissuade people from affiliating with political parties deemed to be pro the regime change agenda. When one looks at his or her wounds, they become a constant reminder of the 2008 political violence. This therefore deprives them of the peace and protection by the law that is due to them.

Arson attacks were also very common in areas such as

Muzarabani. Incidents of arson recorded by HZT surveys reveal that 45% of the victims countrywide had their homes destroyed during the 2008 elections ultimately depriving the victims of decent shelter, clothing, blankets and food. The arson attacks in Muzarabani in the area of Dambakurima resulted in the loss of property worth thousands of dollars since more than 200 houses were burnt down. Some of the instigators of arson attacks in the Dambakurima area were identified as Simbarashe Maweni from the Zimbabwe National Army, Mahofa Rugare, Fibbion Hlamba and Dlamba, a war veteran. This shows the need for security and institutional sector realignment since most of the cases were reported at the local police station in Muzarabani but not much was done, its now 5 years down the line. Though there is a significant reduction in arson, there are still some sporadic incidents being recorded in some areas. In Ward 20, Bindura North, Shane Nyaruvanga, an MDC activist's house was burnt down and in Matepatepa area, there are constant threats of arson attacks for those who support MDC.

Arrests are some of the tactics that were employed by the police in order to daunt and discourage those who spoke out about the atrocities perpetrated by the various state institutions. Some victims were arrested and detained for at least a day while others exceeded three months. These incidents were mostly reported in Buhera, Rusape and Muzarabani where police are notoriously known for executing their duties in a partisan manner. This is a clear indication that violence in Zimbabwe is targeted. Therefore, there is need to carry out vetting and dismissal processes as transitional justice mechanisms

which will ensure that public officials who hold office are there to serve the people instead of infringing on their rights. The communities have lost confidence in the police and this confidence can only be restored by a proper national healing and reconciliation process which ensures that justice prevails and the rule of law is ob-



served without being selective in its application.



Rape was used to afflict and sexually violate women who bore the brunt of this traumatising and inhumane act. Rape is commonly used in war situations to humiliate a person at the same time, rendering them helpless after being robbed of their sexual identity. Women reported that in most instances, they were labelled as prostitutes and were subjected to gang rape. HZT surveys reveal that on 6 May 2008, 3 women were gang raped at Hoya base in Muzarabani. They were also tortured with

fiery coals and threatened to have their genitals reaped apart with knives. Zimbabwe Rape Survivors Association estimates that over 2 000 women and girls were raped between May and June 2008. The sexual abuse resulted in miscarriages, unwanted pregnancies and HIV and AIDS infections in some women. 5 women from Buhera claim that the late Major Svosve was responsible for infecting them with HIV and AIDS. The Geneva Convention classifies rape as a war crime under genocide which goes to show the gravity of the crime. This shows the need for not only psycho-social support, but an effective and efficient national healing and reconciliation framework that will act as a roadmap to help ensure the attainment of sustainable peace, tolerance and co-existence.

Displacement or forced internal and external migration was also used to reduce the victims' standards of living with the intention of dissuading them from taking part in political processes. The victims were banished for months on end and forced to reside under very harsh conditions in mountains and bushes without proper sanitation, food or shelter. Others fled to towns and cities across the country where they were unknown because they feared being abducted, tortured or even murdered. When violence leads to forced migration, it has an effect on the voting patterns since the process is ward based. The Zimbabwe Peace Project Post election violence report reveals that a total of 2 063 cases of internal displacement had been recorded by June 2008.

Abductions are some of the tactics used by quasi-military and military groups to victimise anti ZANU PF sup-

porters. Reports from Buhera West and Buhera South reveal that abductions did not start in 2008 but were also experienced as far back as 2002. In 2002, Buhera South, one Colonel Mzilikazi was the chief instigator of these abductions. He operated in the Muzokomba, Mutiusinazita, Mutepfe and Masasa areas. The HZT findings reveal that more than 20 people were abducted and taken to bases. The traditional leaders also submitted names of people in their villages who they suspected or knew to be MDC activists. The political activists were taken to “bases” and subjected to various inhumane acts after being abducted during the night or early morning hours. There is need for Government to channel efforts towards the destruction of structures such as base camps which are used for purposes of violence since their existence remains a threat to human lives.

Structural Violence is still of great concern. State institutions meant to protect the rights of citizens are also contributing to their infringement. The HZT survey revealed that less than 10% of all crimes committed have been brought before the courts to bring justice to thousands of people victimized. The transitional justice mechanisms of prosecuting offenders which are explicitly provided for in the new constitution must be fully adhered to. Section 50: subsection 9 of the new constitution helps ensure that sustainable peace before, during and after elections is attained. Unlike the Lancaster House Constitution that held the state liable for offences of public officials, the new constitution holds the particular individual to account for offences committed. Therefore, the individual and not the state are responsi-

ble for compensating the victim. This helps as a deterrent since it will show that nobody is unassailable or above the law. According to the HZT survey results, less than 50% of the cases recorded in 2012 were reported to the police. The prosecutions provided for by the Constitution will therefore aid in restoring the citizens confidence in national institutions such as the police and judiciary whose mandate include guaranteeing the security of citizens. The important roles played by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the various Civil Society interventions have been a milestone in supporting the traditional structures of conflict transformation in communities. Chapter 12 of the new constitution also plays a pivotal role in establishing independent commissions meant to support Government in upholding democratic values and practices. If these commissions are fully operationalized, the transition from negative to sustained peace will be realised. History will only repeat itself if calls for peace do not cascade to the grassroots and political parties do not come up with a clear election roadmaps which will ensure a level playing field. The past injustices therefore need to be addressed so that the *let sleeping dogs lie* approach is abandoned. This will make communities aware of the fact that they can freely participate in political processes without fear of prejudice as enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Liberties. HZT trust therefore seeks to remind the Government of the commitment it made to uphold human rights hence it must ensure that the pending elections mirror that obligation by shunning violence and rapidly acting upon all forms of violence in order to achieve a peaceful and prosperous Zimbabwe.

