

RUMBLINGS OF DISCONTENT IN ZANU-PF

Senior party officials dispute the official story that President Robert Mugabe was formally endorsed as ZANU-PF's candidate for the 2008 election.

By Nonthando Bhebhe in Harare

Senior ZANU-PF politicians have disputed the official announcement that they backed Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe to run as the party's candidate in next year's election, but accept that they failed to challenge the decision when it was foisted on them.

After the March 30 meeting of ZANU-PF's Central Committee, party spokesmen told local media that delegates had endorsed Mugabe as the ruling party's candidate, and had agreed to bring the 2010 parliamentary election forward so that it takes place in 2008, at the same time as the presidential ballot.



Credit: Lazele

Mugabe inspects a guard of honour at the independence day celebrations at the Rufaro stadium on April 18.

Top party members are beginning to talk about what happened at the meeting, and they have told IWPR that Mugabe was simply imposed as the candidate, with no debate or formal endorsement taking place.

One senior official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the issue of Mugabe's nomination was never actually discussed, but was slipped in as a resolution at the end of the meeting by allies of the president.

NEWS IN BRIEF

- An estimated 30,000 ZANU-PF supporters turned out at a Harare stadium to see President Robert Mugabe lead a rally marking 27 years of Zimbabwean independence on April 18.
- Information Minister Sikhanyiso Ndlovu, the chief government spokesman, said in a surprise move that licences for all non-government organisations — including foreign aid groups — had been revoked. He said they would have to lodge new

applications so that "agents of imperialism" in "pro-opposition and western organisations masquerading as relief agencies" could be screened out. The government has also cancelled a USAID assistance programme for the Zimbabwean parliament.

- An international association of civil society organisations on April 17 accused Zimbabwean state agents of fanning political violence.
- Zimbabwe's Central Statistical Office on April 16 said it was unable to release key

inflation data for March because a virus had infected its computer system. Analysts say the agency was ordered to withhold the data to avoid embarrassing the government during a visit by envoys from the Southern African Development Community to assess the extent of Zimbabwe's economic crisis.

- Three more opposition activists were arrested over the weekend, as police intensified a crackdown that has seen assaults on opposition leaders and more than 600 activists of the Movement for Democratic Change thrown in jail.

Another ZANU-PF figure who is a member of the ruling Politburo, a smaller body than the Central Committee, said the issue was not discussed because it was not on the agenda for the meeting, which instead focused on matters such as internal party reforms and Zimbabwean agriculture — but not the disastrous state of the economy as a whole.

“Looking at the agenda of the meeting and any other ZANU PF meetings, it seems as if there is no crisis in the country,” said the Politburo member. “It appears like everything is normal and you would not think we are in such a mess.”

Central Committee members were then caught off balance when Elliot Manyika, the party’s “political commissar” and a Mugabe loyalist, announced a series of resolutions which were never discussed. These included the decision to hold simultaneous presidential and parliamentary elections, a new procedure whereby parliament will select a successor if Mugabe resigns before the end of his next term, an increase in the number of parliamentary constituencies from 150 to 210, and the appointment of senators by proportional representation.

Manyika told Central Committee members that these were all resolutions that had been passed at the ZANU-PF party conference last December.

According to IWPR’s source, Manyika said the conference had ‘pledged loyalty to the presidium’, and this was interpreted through Mugabe’s spokesperson George Charamba to mean that we had endorsed Mugabe as our candidate for the 2008 elections.

“We were taken by surprise, as we thought the matter would have been brought up for discussion and then endorsed, or we would have charted the way forward. But this was done deliberately to make sure that no one stood up to contradict it at a meeting being chaired by Mugabe himself.”

The reason the issue was presented in this manner, the Politburo member said, was “because they knew that as soon as it had been announced, no matter how ambiguous it was, no one would have dared stand up and oppose it.

“So what I am saying is that he was not formally endorsed.”

Nor was Mugabe formally backed by ZANU-PF’s Youth League and Women’s League, which were widely reported to have sponsored his nomination. It was only the leaders of the two groups who publicly pledged support for Mugabe.

ZANU-PF leaders should “tell the man to go” — Zimbabwean political commentator.

The ZANU-PF official said that no one in the party would dare raise the matter again, and Mugabe was now free to decide what he was going to do.

“The problem in ZANU-PF is that we are all appointed by the president,” he said. “Some members of the party have been engaging in illegal and corrupt activities and the president has dossiers on them. The president allowed corruption to flourish knowing that one day he would use it against them. Because we are appointed and some of us are corrupt, no one will dare raise the matter at any forums, including the Politburo. The best place to debate the issue was at the Central Committee.”

Members of the ZANU-PF Politburo tried to have the issue debated when it convened two days before the Central Committee meeting, but were brushed off by Mugabe. ZANU-PF sources told IWPR that Simon Khaya Moyo, Zimbabwe’s ambassador to South Africa, asked Mugabe to clarify press reports that he now wanted both elections to happen in 2008 and that he

wanted to stand. An angry Mugabe is said to have told Moyo that this was “none of the Politburo’s business, but a matter for the Central Committee”.

The Politburo official said only the president himself, and pressure from other members of the Southern African Development Community leaders, could change things now. “Don’t expect much from ZANU-PF itself,” he added.

Other ZANU-PF officials have told IWPR that although the next party congress is not due until 2009, a special one is to be held this December to deal with Mugabe’s endorsement.

According to these sources, the party is currently divided into two camps, with one which wants Mugabe to agree not to stand for re-election and to allow ZANU-PF to freely choose his successor at the December congress. The other consists of Mugabe loyalists who may also have their eye on the post of Zimbabwean vice-president, which is likely to come up at the party congress. The incumbent, Joice Mujuru, is expected to be removed as she has made her presidential ambitions plain, to Mugabe’s displeasure.

A political commentator in Harare who did not want to be named said he was disappointed at those ZANU-PF leaders who want Mugabe to step down in 2008 — particularly retired army commander General Solomon Mujuru, who is backing his wife Joice’s presidential bid, and the other likely contender Rural Housing minister Emmerson Mnangagwa — for failing to use meetings such as the Central Committee to challenge Mugabe head on.

“General Mujuru and Mnangagwa have let the people of Zimbabwe down,” said the commentator. “Change can only come from Zimbabwe — we should not expect it to come from [South African president Thabo] Mbeki. They should tell the man to go.”

Nonthando Bhebhe is the pseudonym of a journalist in Zimbabwe. ■

MUGABE PRESSURES MDC PRIOR TO TALKS

Continued violence may be attempt to bring opposition to heel in advance of planned peace negotiations.

By Nkosinathi Ndlovu in Bulawayo

Security force intimidation and brutality continues unabated, despite proposed peace negotiations between the ruling ZANU-PF and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC.

Some believe the violence is an attempt by President Robert Mugabe to soften up his rivals prior to the talks, which are to be brokered by South African president Thabo Mbeki

The climate of intimidation led to the failure of the two-day general strike organised by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, ZCTU, on April 3-4 to garner widespread support, say observers.

The ZCTU demanded a tenfold increase in the industrial minimum wage to at least one million Zimbabwean dollars a month (about 60 US dollars). It also urged Mugabe's government to address the seven-year economic crisis that has manifested itself in the highest inflation rate in the world, massive joblessness and poverty.

There was a heavy police presence in most of Harare's densely-populated suburbs during the strike, while reports of police brutality in recent weeks undoubtedly weakened the resolve of workers to support the strike.

"Images of [MDC spokesman Nelson] Chamisa, Morgan Tsvangirai, Grace Kwinjeh, Sekai Holland and other MDC



Credit: Lazele

One-thousand Zimbabwean dollar bills lie abandoned and worthless in a drain in Harare. Picture taken October 2006.

activists arrested recently are still fresh in people's minds. Mugabe has succeeded in intimidating people and this is why we have a cowed population unwilling to participate in any mass action despite the hardships," said Highfield resident Jonathan Ncube.

"Mugabe has succeeded in intimidating people and this is why we have a cowed population unwilling to participate in any mass action" — Highfield resident Jonathan Ncube.

Savage beatings by police of MDC officials abducted from their homes and party offices led a Harare magistrate to refer them for medical treatment. Two of the men, MDC national executive member Ian Makone and an activist, Shame Wakatama, were apparently unable to stand on their own.

This followed the widely condemned brutal attacks on MDC leaders while in police custody on March 11 for attending what the government deemed a banned meeting.

The attacks prompted the convening of an emergency meeting of the Southern African Development Community, SADC, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, to discuss the deteriorating security situation in Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC, and recent elections in Lesotho.

Commenting on the attacks on members of his party, MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai said, "They were brutalised... They are in bad shape but in high spirits."

Police claimed those arrested were linked to a spate of alleged petrol bombings, which they blame on MDC supporters "bent on illegal regime change". The MDC has denied the allegations.

Credit: Lazele



Ian Makone, a member of the MDC's national executive, is taken away from a magistrates' court on life support on March 31. He was abducted and brutally assaulted in police custody.

One political analyst said the rise in repression was not the action of an aimless dictator but a strategy meant to intimidate opponents and demonstrate that the security agencies, contrary to opposition claims that there have been rumblings of dissent in their ranks, were still prepared to take his orders.

"What Mugabe wants is to set the terms of the negotiations, and to do that he must show that he is still in charge" — analyst

"We may yet see more repression in the weeks or months ahead before the proposed peace talks that SADC has mandated South African president Thabo Mbeki to broker between ZANU-PF and the MDC," said the analyst.

"It [negotiating] is something Mugabe hates doing but he cannot continue to defy world opinion and regional leaders about the terrible economic and worsening political situation in the country."

The analyst said the attacks on the opposition, and in particular its leadership, were meant to break its spirits before the negotiations.

"They must submit to his will, even to humiliating terms [for negotiations]. Mugabe cannot endure meeting Tsvangirai on equal terms," he said. "What Mugabe wants is to set the terms of the negotiations, and to do that he must show that he is still in charge."

The analyst gave the example of the late vice-president Joshua Nkomo, against whose ZAPU party Mugabe launched a bloody military campaign in the early Eighties before swallowing it up in the much-derided Unity Accord of December 22, 1987.

That campaign left 20,000 innocent civilians dead, after Mugabe openly declared that the army did not distinguish between ordinary people and dissidents. Up until now, he has used the same crude language against those opposed to his rule, saying recently that they will be "bashed".

Tsvangirai said the proposed talks between his party and ZANU-PF offered the country a "last chance". At

the same time, his secretary-general Tendai Biti said while the MDC trusted Mbeki as a broker it had no faith in Mugabe.

"The proposed dialogue might offer Zimbabwe one last chance," said Tsvangirai. "Such dialogue is as necessary as it is long overdue, but... it cannot take place under conditions of thuggery and violence against the opposition."

Tsvangirai said dialogue, a new constitution, an overhaul of electoral laws and free and fair elections were the only solutions to Zimbabwe's problems.

"Dialogue... cannot take place under conditions of thuggery and violence against the opposition" — MDC's Tendai Biti.

Since 2000, Mbeki has failed to bring the two warring parties to the negotiation table because Mugabe has rejected any preconditions. Analysts, however, see a better chance now that Mbeki has been sent by SADC to speak on its behalf. They also suggest that Mbeki wants another feather in his cap to add to those he earned for brokering peace in the DRC and Rwanda, before his term ends in 2009.

Mbeki has also warned the West and the MDC against setting conditions for the talks, saying this might jeopardise the regional initiative. He has said, however, that so far he has received no complaints from either ZANU-PF or the MDC about his new role to broker talks between them.

Zimbabwe has been in the grip of a political crisis since Mugabe's disputed re-election in 2002 and the alleged rigging of the parliamentary polls two years earlier.

Nkosinathi Ndlovu is the pseudonym of an IWPR contributor in Zimbabwe. ■

EXILES STEP UP VOTE CAMPAIGN

Zimbabweans abroad want the SADC to force Mugabe to let them take part in next year's crucial ballot.

By Zakeus Chibaya in Johannesburg

Zimbabwean exiles are intensifying their efforts to force the Harare government to allow them to vote in the 2008 presidential election, and have vowed to put pressure on Southern African Development Community, SADC, countries to take a stand on the issue.

It is estimated that there are more than two million Zimbabweans in South Africa alone and many others live in surrounding countries, but the Zimbabwe Supreme Court ruled in 2002 that people outside the country cannot vote in presidential elections.

The exiles say they will pressure the SADC to force President Robert Mugabe to give them the right to vote. They argue that most SADC countries allow postal voting for citizens living in other countries. Under Zimbabwe's electoral laws, only citizens who are away from their home constituency on official duty can cast postal votes — a requirement that critics say has disenfranchised more than four million people.

The Zimbabwean National Constitutional Assembly, NCA, is spearheading the campaign for exiles to fight for their right to vote. It has started awareness-raising programmes to ensure that citizens understand the need for a new constitution that will give exiles the right to vote.

Tapera Kapuya, the NCA's coordinator in South Africa, said, "The reality is that an estimated fifth of our national population is located outside the borders of Zimbabwe. They have been disenfranchised of their citizenship and statehood, and cannot be excluded from contributing to the national vision."



Credit: Lazele

A man pushes a cart containing his allocation of food donated by an NGO in Harare's Workington area. Hunger and poverty have driven many Zimbabweans to leave the country. Picture taken February 2007.

It is believed that 49,000 Zimbabweans enter South Africa each month. With inflation in Zimbabwe reaching 1,700 per cent and prices of basic commodities soaring every day, many risk death, rape and robbery as they cross into South Africa illegally. The exiles say that they are going to use this influx of Zimbabweans into South Africa to force the SADC to put pressure on Mugabe to accept the exile vote.

"An estimated fifth of our national population is located outside the borders of Zimbabwe" — National Constitutional Assembly official Tapera Kapuya.

Tichaona Mutero from Mutoko, north of Harare, who fled the economic turmoil in the country, said, "We need to claim our stake as we are contributing to the country by sending foreign currency back home. There is no way the opposition can win the election without our

participation and that's why Mugabe is boasting of winning the election next year. He knows that his policies and violence has forced millions of his enemies out of the country."

Now operating a makeshift kitchen at the Zimbabwe-bound buses terminus near Park Station in Johannesburg, Mutero has missed two consecutive elections and like many Zimbabweans, he believes his vote is crucial.

"We will fight for our rights to vote and we are now prepared to pay the supreme price — death. The SADC leaders know about the influx of Zimbabweans in their countries and they need to force Mugabe to accept postal voting. The people are now prepared to take Mugabe head on and the exiles have been keeping quiet for a long time, acting as if we are Zanu-PF [ruling party] supporters," said Mutero.

Thompson Temba, a Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, opposition party activist from Bikita, southeast of Zimbabwe, said, "We are going to

demand our right to vote. We have been silent for too long. Mugabe has brutalised and disenfranchised opposition voters but we are regrouping to claim what belongs to us. Mugabe has robbed me of my vote for the past two elections.”

“Mugabe has robbed me of my vote for the past two elections” — MDC activist now in exile.

Temba was a ward coordinator for the MDC but fled the country in 2001 during the by-election, which left many opposition activists brutally tortured by the late war-veteran leader, Chenjerai Hunzvi. “I know the importance of my vote to change the country and I had to fight for it. If the San people in Botswana could claim their land back, how can we fail?” he said.

Makanaka Shoko, a farm worker living near the Musina border town in South Africa, complained bitterly of his treatment at a border post during the election period.

“When I arrived at Beit Bridge [border post] at midnight, I was detained with hundreds of Zimbabweans and we were only released in the late afternoon. When I arrived in my hometown at Nembudziya, Gokwe, the polling

stations had closed. Hundreds of people are prevented from voting through Mugabe’s dirty works,” he said.

Gabriel Shumba, the executive director for the Zimbabwe Exiles’ Forum, ZEF, said, “If countries like Mozambique and Botswana can have postal ballots and if Zimbabwe can allow diplomats postal voting, there is no sense in requiring those in exile to be physically present in the country before they can register and vote.”

Shumba added that since the largely pro-Mugabe Supreme Court has rejected an earlier application by exiled Zimbabweans for their right to vote, it seems the legal route in Zimbabwe has been closed. However, ZEF is taking the case further to the African Commission on Human Peoples’ Rights in May.

The ZEF was formed in South Africa in 2003 and says it is a “non-political, non-profit and non-partisan organisation with an eye on the future of Zimbabwe”.

Kapuya said, “Zimbabweans in the diaspora, like most people back home, may be focused on mere survival issues and unwilling to put themselves at risk by engaging in the struggle of converting ideas into action. But if a new constitution is not crafted with speed, the sitting government will

continue to close the democratic space as it has total power in the country.

“Zimbabweans in the diaspora have no space in the present constitution as the dual citizenship that was scrapped by the government is effectively barring a significant number of Zimbabweans from participating in the electoral processes,” he said.

A group of Zimbabwean exiles calling themselves the Diaspora Vote Action Group petitioned the Supreme Court to reverse a government policy barring exiles from casting their votes a number of years ago. Chief Justice Godfrey Chidyausiku dismissed the application.

“Zimbabweans in the diaspora have no space in the present constitution” — Tapera Kapuya.

Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa said that Zimbabweans outside the country would not be allowed to vote in any election. “The law in our situation is explicit. Citizens of Zimbabwe who are resident will be allowed to vote,” he said.

Zakeus Chibaya is an IWPR contributor. ■

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