

ZIMBABWE NATIONAL STUDENTS UNION



THINK TANK MEETING REPORT



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ZINASU is a national union of students in Zimbabwe's institutions of higher learning, representing more than 350,000 students in 43 institutions including universities, teachers' colleges, polytechnic colleges, vocational training centres and agricultural institutions. Our niche is to defend academic freedoms and rights in Zimbabwe. The organization participates in broader national issues recognizing that the provision of quality education is inseparable from a sound and functional economy, issues of good governance and democracy as well as gender disparities. ZINASU's mission is to champion and protect education as a human right through engaging other stakeholders, including government and college authorities on critical issues affecting education in Zimbabwe. The current issues that students are facing in the broader democratization process are the harmonized 29 March 2008 elections.

This year, ZINASU aims to take a more active role in contributing and making sure that the election process is free and fair, at the same time noting emerging gaps, hence the need to deploy election observers and monitors. There is need for ZINASU to take a pro-active role in the oncoming elections. As we approach election time, pro-democratic voices continue to be suppressed and the level of human rights abuses have intensified ahead of the 2008 National presidential, parliamentary and local government elections. The students and youths should work tirelessly in finding practicable strategies and solutions as we approach the March 29 Elections.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This report captures the events of the think tank meeting that was held at Quality International Hotel on the 12th of March 2008. The meeting was dubbed "The future of Zimbabwe's education and Youths after March 29 General Elections" and was attended by ZINASU National Executive members and twenty members of various partner organizations. The main purpose of the think tank meeting was to set scenarios and map the way forward for both the students union and the youth movement after the March 29 general elections. The meeting was

facilitated by McDonald Lewanika (Students Solidarity Trust) and Mildred Mushinga (Fredrich Ebert Stiftung) who made presentations around the role and positions of students and youths after March 29 General Elections. Various ideas and possible outcomes were discussed and contributions were made through a plenary session.

It was further elaborated that the youths constitute a greater percentage of Zimbabwe's populace and it is their role to safeguard the country's heritage and sovereignty. The think tank meeting gave direction and clearly outlined the position and the role of youths before, during and after elections. It was further debated whether the youths in Zimbabwe are prepared for the aftermath of the elections in the view that the ruling party wins again the elections and their readiness for the Kenyan scenario in the event that they believe the elections are rigged. Various speakers agreed to the fact that if elections are rigged in the March 29 elections, youths should arise and protest against their vote as many believe the outcome of the elections determines a lot the future of the youths in Zimbabwe.

3. AIMS & OBJECTIVES

- Ensuring that students are part and parcel of the electoral process through contributing to the voting process so as to come out with a clear post election analysis and position.
- To enable students to argue from a more informed position on the result of the electoral process
- To mobilize all the youths in Zimbabwe to actively participate in the election processes
- Youths need to fight from a common front in an effort to defend their rights and freedoms in Zimbabwe

4. SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES



Opening remarks were made by ZINASU Vice President Brilliant Dube by way of introductions. She acknowledged the presence of all who attended the meeting and elaborated on the importance of the meeting as it is a platform for youths to determine their future through the outcomes of the elections.

Lovemore Chinoputsa, the Secretary General for ZINASU outlined the role played by student activists in Zimbabwe, who are fighting tirelessly for a robust and sound education delivery system that is affordable to all irregardless of the color, age, race, tribe or political affiliation. He encouraged students to work together towards a common goal. Presenters were introduced and welcomed to the meeting. These were Mcdonald Lewanika, Student Solidarity Trust (SST) and Mildred Mushinga from Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) who embraced the idea of the think tank meeting as it gave an opportunity to youth organizations to meet and deliberate on issues of national relevance which affect the welfare of the youth movement at large.

DISCUSSION PAPER

The President of ZINASU, Clever Bere was introduced gave a detailed presentation on the discussion paper. He outlined the objectives as follows:

- To give direction and clearly outline the role of students and youths before, during and after elections.

- To set up and map up possible outcomes of the March 29 Elections (scenario setting).
- Come up with workable solutions and strategies that are responsive to the given scenarios.
- To prepare the student and youth movement for all possible outcomes so as to avoid a situation where youths and students become reactive rather than pro-active.

He elaborated that the March 29 Elections have a great impact on the youths and students of Zimbabwe than any other group and as such youths and students must not be found wanting but instead, be very much prepared and give answers to some hard questions that will be asked after the announcement of the results. Mr. Bere concurred with other political observers that the current situation in Zimbabwe is not conducive for free and fair elections and that the government was not adhering to the SADC Principles and Guidelines governing the conduct of democratic elections and that the present crisis in the country was a governance and political crisis which needs people of Zimbabwe to provide workable solutions.

The President alluded to the fact that it is difficult for free and fair elections to take place where he referred to the recent utterances by Constance Chiwenga the Army Chief, Augustine Chihuri Commissioner of Police and the Prison services Commissioner Zimondi that they will not salute a non ZANU PF President which clearly shows that it is impossible for Zimbabwe to have a smooth transition in the event that the opposition wins the elections. He stated that it is also evident that these ZANU PF apologists will not easily recognize results which will not favour their egotistic needs. He further explained that current legislative are not conducive for elections and the current flawed constitution which has had piecemeal amendments does not give room for a free and fair election

Reference was made to the Kibaki/Odinga scenario in Kenya which was labelled a cause for concern where thousands of civilians lost their lives in a very sad occurrence of a reportedly serious election fraud. He posed a question to the audience whether Zimbabweans were geared for the Kenyan situation. He left it to the panel to deliberate on the possibilities and possible practical responses to the March 29 elections and elaborated further that the meeting was meant to

prepare youths and students for any outcomes given the uncertainty surrounding the March 29 poll.

4.1Mcdonald Lewanika (Student Solidarity Trust)

Zimbabwe's compliance with SADC principles



Opened his presentation by stating the SADC principles in the conduct of elections

SADC Principles:

- Full participation of citizens in the political process
- Freedom of association
- Political tolerance
- Regular intervals
- Equal opportunity to access the state media
- Equal opportunity to vote and be voted for
- Independence of the Judiciary and impartiality of the electoral institutions
- Voter education
- Acceptance and respect of electoral results by political parties proclaimed to be free and fair by the competent National Electoral Authorities
- Challenging the electoral results as provided for by the law

The presenter explained that in Zimbabwe there is no equal opportunity to access state media and that there is impartiality of the judiciary and the electoral authority. He stated that there is no way the people of Zimbabwe are going to accept the outcome of the elections if it's evident that the elections have been rigged. It is very difficult for people to accept the outcome putting into cognisance the fact that Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) had barred independent bodies for example the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) from educating and disseminating election information to the electorate.

He elaborated further that there is need for political parties to freely organise meetings and rallies without intimidation or harassments by suspected ruling party supporters. There is need for protection of candidates from unwarranted arrests and gave an example of the recent unwarranted arrests of Marvellous Kumalo the Movement For Democratic Change (MDC) candidate for St Marys. He pointed out the requirements of free and fair elections:

What are free and fair election

- Elections administered impartially and procedures are clear and can be checked by party agents and acceptable election observers
- All adults 18 years and above should be allowed to vote
- Registration should be non discriminatory
- Voters can make own choices and vote secretly without pressure
- Full participation by registered voters
- Parties free to organise meetings
- Protection of candidates
- Equal access to media
- Dispute settlement mechanisms

He closed his presentation by alluding to the fact that the forthcoming elections leaves a lot to be desired putting into consideration the politicisation of the armed forces

PLENARY SESSION

The session was facilitated by Mr Chinoputsa who opened the floor for discussions:

-Mehluli Dube (ZINASU) – stated that there are serious problems with policy makers referring to the SADC principles which he said has failed to put stringent measures for those who have failed to abide by the demands of the SADC rules and principles for example Zimbabwe but SADC has done nothing about it

-Lovemore Chinoputsa (ZINASU) –Explained that the SADC guidelines demand that election observers should be present in a country where elections are to be held 90 days before election date but here in Zimbabwe the SADC observers only arrived three weeks before the elections.

-Benjamin Nyandoro (ZINASU) - posed a question on the reaction of youths if Simba Makoni wins the elections and their reaction if Mugabe or Tsvangirai wins, what connotations does it have on the students' wellbeing

-Hope Gumbo (ZIMCODD) – explained that Zimbabweans in the past three months were confused whether to participate or not in the forthcoming elections as the MDC was also in a state of confusion only to decide later that it was going to participate. He posed a question whether it is necessary for an ordinary citizen to participate in already rigged elections. –He pointed out that every one knows that Robert Mugabe has failed and as youths they should take serious action against him if he rigs the elections. He said students should continue defending their academic rights even after March 29 Elections.

-Tyson (SAYWHAT) –He emphasised that Mugabe will rig and win the elections hence youths organizations should put down demands of students(manifesto), that are comprehensive concerning the interest of students. He said students should not openly support any candidate openly but should support candidates who have the interests of the students at heart. Students should hold accountable whoever they are rallying behind accountable to the interests of students.

-George Makoni (Youth Forum) – Elaborated that youths and students should stop the praising of leaders but advance their own interests as students first, should demand to those they want into power an ultimatum to resolve the needs of students soon as they are in power. He further said students should protest if Mugabe wins and also dismissed Simba Makoni as a ZANU Pf crony, and to him he is not the solution that the people of Zimbabwe want

-Mashungu (SCMZ) - He emphasised that the student movement should strategise through its structures and map a way forward putting all the threats they put in newspapers into action if they believe that the elections are rigged and should be prepared for action.

-Chiedza Gadzirai (ZINASU) –If Zanu Pf wins the elections, the whole nation should protest the outcome

-James (YIDEZ) –Youths should come up with effective strategies and solutions after the elections, strategies and solutions that will advance the interests of students and youths.

Mildred Mushinga (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung)

Guiding Principles and Values in coming up with non violent strategies and approaches

She opened her presentation by emphasising that the struggle in Zimbabwe has been prolonged and students should continue fighting the war without weapons and be able to negotiate with opponents but she also questioned to what extent should youths continue using non violent strategies for example sit ins, ultimatums, peaceful protests as these have proved over the years to be useless.

The presenter also articulated the fact that as youths they should always assess how useful and rewarding the methods they are using are. She also stated that they should find other means of tackling the political situation in the country especially ahead of the March 29 National elections.

She categorised non violent actions into three:

- 1) Protest and pervasion
- 2) Non cooperation
- 3) Non violent intervention

The presenter encouraged students to form a parallel Government if things do not normalise after the elections, a Government that is functional and has interests of students at heart. The youths were further commended for the endurance and resilience for the past years they have shown in defending academic freedoms in Zimbabwe. The youths were motivated to continue soldiering on as they approach the crucial March 29 Elections. The discussion

paved way for another plenary session which was facilitated again by the ZINASU Secretary General.

PLENARY SESSION



-Sendisa Ndlovu (SAYWHAT) - Articulated that political parties should first attach the demands of ZINASU and promise to deliver before the elections. He further encouraged youths to fully participate in the election and come up with strategies as youth organizations that would mobilise people to go out and vote. He further elaborated that the youths should come up with a coordinated front for young people, a post election scenario, the what and why of the struggle have been said now want the how part, youths should be prepared for action after the elections.

First scenario: If Mugabe wins:

-Themba Maphenduka (ZINASU) – He emphasised that if Mugabe wins the March 29 elections the youths should make sure that the country becomes ungovernable. He demanded youths to reclaim their rights as he believed that the people of Zimbabwe have been patient enough, students should sacrifice their lives and strive for freedom.

-Hopewell Gumbo (ZIMCDD) - He explained that most Zimbabweans are tired and that it is time that their anger be turned into action. He urged the students movement to reorganise its constituencies and get the students to participate in the election process in their numbers.

Second scenario: If M.D.C wins:

Sendisa Ndlovu(SAYWHAT) - He urged students not to suffer from complacency but should continue articulating their issues .He added that students should not over align themselves with political parties by acting as ushers but should go to the negotiating table with real issues affecting students and youths as a whole
-Mashungu (S.C.M.Z) – Elaborated that youths and students should map the way forward now on the action to be taken if Mugabe wins the elections.

Closing remarks

Were made by Brilliant Dube who thanked all the participants for participating in such an important meeting and encouraged youths and students to work together and fight towards a common goal as we approach the March 29 anticipated elections.

The meeting was very successful as youth organizations were able to meet and articulate on important issues of National relevance. The participants promised to meet again soon after the elections and map the way forward on the action to be employed if the outcomes of the elections do not favour the interests of the youths.

Lists of Participants

- ZINASU National Executive Council comprising: The President, Clever Bere, Vice President, Brilliant Dube, Secretary General, Lovemore Chinoputsa, Treasurer, Themba Maphenduka, Information and Publicity Secretary, Blessing Vava, International Relations Officer, Chiedza Gadzirai, Sports and Recreation Officer, Lydia Mudehwe, Legal Affairs Secretary, Courage Ngwarai, Education and Research Secretary, Freeman Bhoso
- ZINASU Secretariat: Benjamin Nyandoro, Sitabile Dewa and Mellissa Ndlovu
- Friedrich Ebert Stiftung- Mildred Mushinga
- Student Solidarity Trust – McDonald Lewanika
- Students Christian Movement of Zimbabwe – Lawrence Mashungu
- S.A.Y.W.H.A.T - Sendisa Ndlovu and Tyson
- ZIMCodd - Hopewell Gumbo
- YIDEZ - James
- Youth Agenda - George Makoni
- National Youth Development Trust – Mzwandile Ndlovu
- Artists For Democracy in Zimbabwe Trust – Silvanos Mudzova
- Youth Forum – George Makoni and Glanis