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Introduction

Both Houses are not sitting this week as they adjourned last week to 8 March 2011. However, committees continued meeting. Below are some highlights of committee meetings held this week.

Defence and Home Affairs

The much-awaited meeting between the Committees of Defence and Home Affairs, and Peace and Security, and the Commissioner-General of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), Augustine Chihuri, finally took place today, Thursday 3 March 2011. Commissioner Chihuri appeared before the two Committees in the company of Melusi Matshiya, the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Commissioner-General Chihuri blamed political parties (ZANU PF and MDC-T) for fanning violence in the country and dismissed allegations that the police were biased in handling cases of politically motivated violence. He said the police responded to violence without fear or favour. He gave the following statistics of political violence in the country from January 2011 to date;

Province	No. of reported cases of violence	No. of ZANU PF Activists Arrested	No. of MDC-T Activists Arrested
Harare	19	8	42
Mash West	2	0	12
Bulawayo	4	0	3
Manicaland	3	10	20
Midlands	3	0	10
Mash Central	4	2	3
Mat North	1	0	4
Mash East	1	0	1
Masvingo	3	0	7

He seemed to apportion more blame to the MDC-T for political violence in the country as he said police records showed that high ranking MDC-T officials such as Deputy Prime Minister Thokozani Khupe, the Co-Minister of Home Affairs Theresa Makone, Hon. Douglas Mwonozora and Hon. Tongai Matutu, among others, had been involved in acts of violence before.

The ZRP Commissioner-General told the Committee that cases of politically motivated violence normally surge whenever there was talk of elections, EU meetings to extend sanctions and events where the President was the guest of honour. When asked how an EU meeting being held in Europe could precipitate violence in the country, he said it was abundantly clear that a certain political party was instigating violence to influence the decision of EU to extend sanctions in the country.

Chihuri was noncommittal on statistics of people who had been arrested for political violence that engulfed the country in June 2008 elections. Instead, he referred the Committee to the Organ on National Healing and Integration.

Public Works and National Housing

The Committee resolved to hear oral evidence from the Ministry of National Housing and Social Amenities. The Ministry will give the Committee an update on the official launch of the National Housing Policy and the viable projects that the ministry was currently pursuing.

In particular, the Committee wants to know how far the Ministry has gone with the National Housing Policy, the Land Developers Bill and the first phase of the National Housing Loan Facility. Committee Members expressed concern that the fund may be used to enrich certain individuals. As such, the Committee would want to determine transparency issues and if the Ministry is looking at repayment possibilities.

Transport, Communications and Infrastructure Development Committee:

The Transport, Communications and Infrastructure Development Portfolio Committee heard oral evidence from Mr. Patson Mbiriri, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Infrastructural Development on 28th of February 2011.

The Permanent Secretary confirmed to the committee that Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) was responsible for both ticketing and collection of toll fees. He indicated that there had been previous unsuccessful attempts to get Zimbabwe National Roads Authority (ZINARA) to at least generate the tickets. The Permanent Secretary explained to the Committee background to the current arrangement. He said tolling emanated from the January 2009 budget presentation with the expectation that ZINARA would begin tolling immediately. Although the enabling legislation was already in place (Toll Roads Act), ZINARA, at the time, lacked the necessary capacity to effect its statutory mandate. The Committee also heard that the Department of Roads could not take up the mandate as the Department was short staffed: the Department only had a skeletal staff as most of its skilled workers had left. As such, ZIMRA was chosen to act as an agent to collect toll fees on ZINARA's behalf. In return, ZIMRA would get 30% of the proceeds for its services. In order to start tolling, ZIMRA hired the necessary equipment and personnel and started originating tickets and tolling in August 2009. That arrangement has subsisted to date.

The Permanent Secretary further stated that last year, ZIMRA rebuffed an effort to split the functions of originating the tickets, the collection of toll fees and the management of the whole process between itself and ZINARA. The intention was to have ZINARA originate the tickets and ZIMRA to collect the tollgate fees as a way of checks and balances. Unfortunately, the two departments failed to agree on the issue.

The Permanent Secretary admitted to the Committee Members that there were inherent weaknesses in the current system, hence the attempt to split ZIMRA's functions vis-à-vis the tolling system. He told the Committee that ZINARA was in the process of being capacitated to perform its statutory mandate. To verify the proceeds ZINARA was getting from ZIMRA, Ministry officials have been posted on 16 tollgates to count vehicle volumes so as to have an

estimate of what to expect from ZIMRA. However, the Permanent Secretary admitted that the system was not foolproof: the system was only useful up to a point. He said in the long run, the ministry would install automated system to ensure transparency and accountability.

Regarding the construction of the toll gates infrastructure, Mr. Mbiriri said the tendere was issued to two companies, namely; Tega Steel (which was given 15 tollgates) and More Wear Industries (which got 9). He said the structures they were putting up were such that they could be removed if need be. He attributed delays in the completion of these toll gates to the heavy rains and the shortage of PC15 cement that the country experienced until October/November last year.

When asked if tolling was achieving its intended goal, the Permanent Secretary indicated that ZINARA had only managed to maintain Zimbabwe's trunk road network by patching potholes, cutting grass and bushes along the trunk roads, and resealing bad areas on the trunk system. However, the Permanent Secretary noted that at the level they were tolling, they had not been able to dualise the road network.

Industry and Commerce

The Committee considered the National Incomes and Pricing Commission Amendment Bill. There was general consensus that the Commission and the enabling National Incomes and Pricing Commission Act had outlived their usefulness with the introduction of the multi-currency regime and the stabilization of the economy. The Act was passed in a hyperinflationary environment where prices went up daily. Because the Act and the Commission had outlived their usefulness, the Committee concurred that the Act should be repealed and the Commission should be dissolved. There was a suggestion that the Commission's mandate be transferred to ZIMSTAT (Central Statistics Office), the Competition and Tariffs Commission or a department in the Ministry of Industry and Commerce.

The Committee resolved to hold public hearings on the Bill on 15th of March 2011. To that end, the Committee would ask the Minister to defer the Second Reading of the Bill to a later date.

The Committee had also resolved to conduct public hearings during the International Trade Fair in Bulawayo on why businesses were relocating from the city. However, it was advised by Administration of Parliament that this would create a counter-attraction to the event. Hence the committee resolved to carry-out the public hearings either before or after the International Trade Fair scheduled for April.

Health and Child Welfare Committee

The committee held a stakeholders' consultative meeting on its work plan on the 1st of March 2011. Among some stakeholders present were representatives from the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare, SAFAIDS, Childline Zimbabwe, Community Working Group on Health and Save the Children. The following highlights emerged from the meeting:

- There was need for the committee to lobby for the allocation of 15% of the total annual budget towards health provision in keeping with the Abuja Declaration.
- The Community Working Group on Health impressed upon the committee that there was need for it to advocate for a bigger budget allocation towards health.
- The need for the committee to hold public hearings on user fees was stressed and it was noted that the policy was already in place on the exemption of senior citizens, children under 5 years of age and pregnant women from paying user fees yet this policy was not being adhered to.
- The areas of budget formulation, budget tracking and monitoring, field visits to hospitals and other health care facilities and the committee's legislative oversight role emerged as the major areas which the committee should prioritize.
- SAFAIDS and the Community Working Group on Health committed themselves to assisting the committee financially when they could.
- The committee stressed the importance of constant interaction between itself and its stakeholders so as to maintain amicable working relationships.

State Enterprises and Parastatals

The Committee received oral evidence from the Zimbabwe Electricity Transmission and Distribution Company, which was represented by Mr Chifamba. The major highlights of the presentation were as follows:

- ZESA was not able to maintain a continuous power supply to the majority of customers due to a power shortfall. About 1300MW of power was available against a national demand of up to 2100MW. As a result customers were experiencing load shedding.
- Some constraints in providing continuous power supply to customers are due to network faults caused by the aging of the electrical infrastructure, theft and vandalism of network components.
- ZESA had scaled down on meter reading because it was expensive in terms of manpower and resources. Hence customers would receive estimated bills.
- ZESA was experiencing challenges with the billing system in Harare and Western Regions resulting in erroneous bills.
- ZESA was owed over \$475 million by customers

Resumption of Parliament Business

Both Houses are resuming business on 8 March 2011.