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Mugabe to Draft Youth Militia into Civil Service

By Staff Reporter

Robert Mugabe will next year draft hundreds of graduates of the government's controversial youth militia programme into the civil service but to solely campaign for his ruling ZANU PF party and bolster its support among young Zimbabweans, sources said.

The sources, who are senior officials in the Ministry of Youth Development and in ZANU PF, said the plan to hire the youths on taxpayers' expense to campaign for the ruling party was first recommended by the party's politburo last September and approved by Mugabe's Cabinet the same month.

The youths—accused by churches and human rights groups of beating, torturing and murdering opposition supporters—will be employed as government youth development officers and stationed in all provinces of the country, according to sources.

“The politburo recommended in September that national youth service graduates be given government jobs and be tasked with promoting the party. The Cabinet immediately endorsed the plan,” said a senior official at ZANU PF headquarters in Harare, who spoke on condition he was not named.

He added: “The youths will spearhead our (ZANU PF) campaigns but they will be officially recognised as government employees because that is the only way the party could afford to pay them . . . it is a very innovative way to re-energise the party if you consider that most war veterans are now old and tired.”

Veterans of Zimbabwe's 1970s independence war have been the mainstay of ZANU PF's election machine, running violent campaigns especially in rural areas to ensure victory for the party that has ruled Zimbabwe since independence from Britain 26 years ago.

But many of the former fighters are now too old to be able to run around villages mobilising votes for ZANU PF in 2008 when the next major poll is due.

Deputy Youth Development Minister Saviour Kasukuwere confirmed the planned youth recruitment but dismissed as “downright nonsense” suggestions that the youths would be tasked to campaign for ZANU PF.

Kasukuwere said: "When they go for national youth training we teach them income generating projects and we want them to pass on these skills to other youths in various wards.

“As far as we know, these youths have been very disciplined so fears that they will force people to support ZANU PF in their areas of operation are misplaced, in fact, it's downright nonsense. We are simply creating jobs for our youths.”

But an alarmed Catholic Archbishop Pius Ncube—a prominent Mugabe critic—called the plan to place youth militia in every province an attempt by the government to create a Janjaweed-type militia to terrorise its political opponents.

The Janjaweed militia that is backed by the government of Sudan is blamed of causing mayhem in that country's Darfur region.

The clergyman said: "It means we will have militias paid through our taxes roaming our villages, especially during election time, terrorising people into supporting the government. They are creating a Janjaweed of some sort."

According to our sources, 200 graduates from the youth militia programme will be recruited into the civil service by the end of this year and a further 800 will be employed by the state early next year.

The youths, who will require no other qualification except a certificate showing that they completed national youth service training, will be ranked and paid as Grade C3 employees, the same level as teachers and nurses.

The youths will initially be working in rural areas but the plan is to have them also deployed in urban areas where the government hopes to neutralize opposition support.

The government's North Korean-style youth militia programme that began in 2000 is blamed for brainwashing youths into zealots of Mugabe and his government, who are only too eager to use force and violence against critics and opponents of the government.

The government, which insists the youth militia programme is meant to inculcate patriotism into the minds of young Zimbabweans, denies that graduates of the programme victimise opposition supporters.

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