

Misrule in Zimbabwe: Robert Mugabe Presiding

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By Emmanuel Abalo
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The southern African nation of Zimbabwe is today reeling from crippling effects of massive economic and political stagnation brought on in part by some of the misguided and intolerant policies of its present administration headed by President Robert Mugabe. Zimbabwe, formerly known as Rhodesia during the colonial rule of Britain, gained independence on April 12, 1980 and has been ruled since by the Mr. Mugabe who is a product of the armed struggle for independence. But clearly, nowadays, he has become quite insensitive to the reality and detached from the suffering of his own people.

The euphoria of the birth of a new nation at the time with all the hopes and aspirations of Zimbabweans and Africans in modern times have, however, since dissipated with the loss of integrity and good governance under Mr. Mugabe.

The stark reality is that ordinary Zimbabweans are faced with food and fuel shortages, malnutrition, a disproportionate HIV pandemic, declining workers' wages, perceived widespread governmental corruption, inflation, accelerating unemployment and a general meltdown in all aspects of life in the country.

Malnutrition is becoming more widespread in Zimbabwe as food shortages intensify. Hospital doctors in Harare, the capital, report a sharp increase in patients suffering from malnutrition-related ailments, while health care workers in Bulawayo say they are seeing many more undernourished children as food costs soar out of reach.

The country's food crisis had caught up with the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), which had started to send mostly junior officers on forced leave as it was unable to "provide three meals a day". Unnamed army officials are quoted by the private press in Harare as saying because of these problems the ZNA had even suspended recruitments.

In its frantic effort to head off the general decline, Mr. Mugabe's government instituted a violent "land grab" program affecting white farmers and tried to justify this failed drama by stoking the flames of xenophobia.

The reason has to do with the Lancaster House agreement signed in 1979. This agreement stipulated that the existing land tenure system would sit out for 10 years and thereafter the British Government would fund a land resettlement exercise.

The Government of Zimbabwe was content to allow the existing land tenure system to remain intact simply because the British Conservative Party Government which gave Zimbabwe its independence provided a large sum of cash for land reform purposes.

The Zimbabwean government further argues that the solution to the land issue in Zimbabwe prior to the year 2000 clearly lay with the British Government, noting that had the British Government been persuaded to fund the land reform as before there would have been no large scale expropriations of farmland. The resultant is that some war veterans have been rewarded with and now occupy some of the once prosperous white owned farms but can barely afford a hoe to till the soil let alone acquire the knowledge and implements to maintain the production of needed crops.

Out of a field of six opposition parties, the only viable opposition entity the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) led by Morgan Tsvangirai, a former miner turned political figure, remains a democratic alternative and perhaps the hope in checking the decline of Zimbabwe. Let me quickly point out, however, that the this forward looking statement, in no way, suggests a blanket support or accommodation of this opposition group.

Interestingly, Mr. Tsvangirai is quoted once as intimating that his strategy for unseating President Mugabe is to allow, he, Mugabe to mismanage the country until he was forced out of power. The concern here is that to passively allow continuous misrule by any government is a disservice to the principles of democracy and trusteeship of the aspirations of those who desire a better life and dignity for the country Zimbabwe. This argument is not to ignore the engagement, political competition and pressure that the opposition MDC maintains in the face of organized harassment, intimidation, false accusations and elections rigging by the government.

The way forward

The Zimbabwean Constitution provides citizens the right to change their government peacefully; however, this right has been seriously curtailed and restricted because the political process has been practically skewed repeatedly in favor the of the ruling ZANU-PF.

We do not support a violent change of government in Zimbabwe but support strict sanctions against key players who are stifling political and economic progress in Zimbabwe and the southern African region.

The United States, Britain and the European Union (EU) have all imposed a travel ban on some top Zimbabwean government officials and are prepared to issue more restrictions. And so since Zimbabwean President Mr. Mugabe is behaving badly and he is an African embarrassment, the African Union (AU) can and must actively be engaged in resolving the issues in Zimbabwe. A timetable must be issued to Mr. Mugabe to effect a government of national unity, national reconciliation and national elections or face isolation and sanctions as may be deemed necessary.

The Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) which unites nine southern African states with a combined population of 60 million, has as its objective the task of promoting economic development and realizing economic independence, must also engage Zimbabwe aggressively as a partner and advisor.

Our neighbor's house, Zimbabwe, is on fire and we can ill afford to stand idly by. The way forward is the government's willingness to examine its own attitude towards the hopeless plight of the common Zimbabwean with a view to instituting political, electoral and economic reforms.

About the author:

Emmanuel Abalo is an exiled Liberian journalist, media and human rights activist. He served as a former News Director of the erstwhile Catholic owned ELCM Community Radio and later with the Liberian Broadcasting System (ELBC). He is the former Acting President of the Press Union of Liberia (PUL). Mr. Abalo presently resides in Pennsylvania, USA and works as an analyst with CITIGROUP, North America.