

In Britain a merry-go-round suggests an abandonment to joy, cheerfulness and hope – the very spirit of the post-Christmas New Year season. But a merry-go-round can also mean something else: being repeatedly led down an unproductive path with no escape.

It's the second version that Zimbabweans here in the UK believe is stopping us from coming home – as we would all love to do, especially at this time of year. To be with our families and friends in our own country and its sounds and smells and warmth . . . that's joy!

But despite Mnangagwa's vacuous promise that 'the worst is over', Zimbabweans know that nothing the President says can be believed and that, as we approach a new decade, the future is still bleak, with little to hope for under a mafia regime drowning in deceit, incompetence and corruption.

As the New York Times puts it: 'Government disfunction, and economic meltdown, drought and a calamitous flood has plunged Zimbabwe into a hunger crisis'. The article spells out the desperate situation: "The money here is valueless now," said Mr. Dunha, who has eight children. All they can afford to eat, he said, are vegetables and sadza. Gerald Bourke, a spokesman for the southern Africa operations of the World Food Program, the anti-hunger agency of the United Nations, said that until recently 60 percent of its assistance to Zimbabweans was in the form of cash, but that the recipients no longer wanted the money. "Inflation is a rampant problem and people said, We'd prefer the food," Mr. Bourke said. (See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/25/world/africa/zimbabwe-hunger-famine.html> .)

On the political front, hopes of talks between the government and the opposition faded when Mnangagwa insisted that he would not engage with MDC president Chamisa outside the Political Actors' Dialogue (POLAD) that he set up with the fringe political parties who took part in the 2018 elections.

Chamisa has said he would never join this grouping and criticised Mnangagwa's last meeting with POLAD which took place at his Kwekwe farm, where he was filmed, still wearing his silly scarf in the middle of summer, feeding his fish. 'We must feed the people not the fish,' Chamisa said.

MDC faction leader Thokazani Khupe who attended the meeting was accused of supporting the President. Meanwhile a new MDC faction called the MDC Zimbabwe has registered with the Electoral Commission. Its only known member Thulani Ndebele denied he was being used by Zanu PF though most totalitarian states like Zimbabwe are known to create fictitious opposition parties to delude the outside world.

As we end the decade we can report that, after much research the Vigil has failed to find another country with two vice presidents both of whose wives are in jail, one for trying to kill her husband and the other for complaining her husband tried to kill her. It seems a shame that they are not sharing a cell. Domestic bliss in Zanu PF!

Other points

- A glimpse into how much of Zimbabwe's mineral wealth is escaping government coffers was given by Mnangagwa at an anti-corruption symposium. He said that on a visit to Dubai last month he was told by one company that they had received US\$60 million of gold through the black market (see: <https://www.thestandard.co.zw/2019/12/22/us60-m-gold-smuggled-dubai/>).
- Few as we were at the Vigil, we were encouraged by a visit by fellow long-term human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell.
- Thanks to those who came early to help set up the front table and put up the banners: Alice Majola, Chido Makawa, Rosemary Maponga, Charles Mararirakwenda, Margaret Munenge, Ephraim Tapa and Kevin Wheeldon. Thanks to Rosemary for looking after the front table, to Kevin and Charles for handing out flyers, to Chido for prayers and drumming and to Chido and Alice for photos. Thanks to all those who brought refreshments: to Rosemary for bringing a thermos flask of hot water with milk for tea and coffee and to Chido and Heather Makawa for bringing cake and other refreshments.
- For latest Vigil pictures check: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/zimb88abwvlgil/> . Please note: Vigil photos can only be downloaded from our Flickr website.

FOR THE RECORD: 10 signed the register.

EVENTS AND NOTICES:

- **ROHR general members' meeting.** Saturday 11th January from 11.30 am. Venue: Royal

Festival Hall, South Bank Centre, Belvedere Road SE1 8XX. Contact: Ephraim Tapa 07940793090, Patricia Masamba 07708116625, Esther Munyira 07492058109.

- **ROHR Valentine's fundraising dinner dance.** Saturday 15th February from 7 pm till late. Venue: to be advised.

- **The Restoration of Human Rights in Zimbabwe (ROHR)** is the Vigil's partner organization based in Zimbabwe. ROHR grew out of the need for the Vigil to have an organization on the ground in Zimbabwe which reflected the Vigil's mission statement in a practical way. ROHR in the UK actively fundraises through membership subscriptions, events, sales etc to support the activities of ROHR in Zimbabwe. Please note that the official website of ROHR Zimbabwe is <http://www.rohrzimbabwe.org/>

. Any other website claiming to be the official website of ROHR in no way represents us.

- **The Vigil's book 'Zimbabwe Emergency'** is based on our weekly diaries. It records how events in Zimbabwe have unfolded as seen by the diaspora in the UK. It chronicles the economic disintegration, violence, growing oppression and political manoeuvring – and the tragic human cost involved. It is available at the Vigil. All proceeds go to the Vigil and our sister organisation the Restoration of Human Rights in Zimbabwe's work in Zimbabwe. The book is also available from Amazon.

- **Facebook pages:** Vigil: <https://www.facebook.com/zimbabwevigil>

ROHR: <https://www.facebook.com/Restoration-of-Human-Rights-ROHR-Zimbabwe-International-370825706588551/>

ZAF: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Zimbabwe-Action-Forum-ZAF/490257051027515>