

Former Tourism Minister Walter Mzembi used to be keen on what he called 'rebranding' Zimbabwe. He could see that the country's image abroad had been tainted by Mugabe's misrule and thought cosmetic public relations would help bring in tourists.

Mzembi is now on the run from corruption charges but his propaganda idea has been picked up by the Mnangagwa government which has decided to pay half a million dollars a year to an American Trump-supporting PR firm to try to persuade the US authorities that sanctions against Zimbabwe are not justified.

The Vigil was skeptical at the time about Mzembi's rebranding efforts and we think that the money now being spent could more usefully buy drugs for hospital patients or fix the water supply in Harare, where some areas have been told that they will only have running water for one or two days a week, if that.

It is clear there are two divergent forces in the government: reformers and old school Zanu PF diehards. The mere fact that the government is still trotting out the tired Mugabe mantra of 'illegal sanctions' would seem to suggest that the blockheads are in charge.

Zimbabwean constitutional lawyer Fadzayi Mahere points out US sanctions could not be illegal as they were authorized by the American legislature. But the Zimbabwean government seems to have learned nothing from its failed legal challenge against the sanctions imposed by the European Union.

Former US Ambassador to Zimbabwe Bruce Wharton lamented that Zimbabwe had missed a great opportunity to move forward following the coup. 'Hopes that Zimbabwe, through Mnangagwa, would be one of those rare examples of a military coup that restores democracy are slowly and methodically being dashed by a military not willing to allow change.'

A more positive attitude has been taken by reformers in the government. Finance Minister Mthuli Ncube has openly condemned Mugabe's land reform programme, saying the cancellation of property rights and security of tenure had reduced land to a 'dead asset', giving farmers little access to loans. Furthermore, it appears that the misconceived indigenisation policy is to be

binned.

Reformers received encouragement from an unlikely source, the Zanu PF Youth League. Its leader Pupurai Togarepi suggested Mugabe could be stripped of all honours bestowed on him during his time in office. 'Can we walk on roads named after a person who destroyed the dreams and aspirations of a generation, these are questions that we need to discuss and debate.' (See: <https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/2019/03/05/zanu-pf-wants-mugabe-strippe-d-of-honours>).

The Vigil thinks that rather than 'rebranding' Zimbabwe the government should 'debrand' it – perhaps starting by renaming the Robert Gabriel Mugabe International Airport.

Other points

- Thanks to those who came early to help set up the front table and put up the banners: Abigail Chidavayenzi, Tinotenda Chihope, Marvellous Chinguwa, Daizy Fabian, Deborah Harry, Simbarashe Jingo, Josephine Jombe, Jonathan Kariwo, Rosemary Maponga, Nyarai Masvosva, Joyce Mbairatsunga, Bianca Mpawaenda, Margaret Munenge, Esther Munyira, Collen Mupazviriho, Tapiwa Muskwe, Siphon Ndlovu, Casper Nyamakura, Simon Nyanhi, Bigboy Sibanda, Ephraim Tapa and Reuben Waretsa. Thanks to Josephine, Rosemary and Deborah for looking after the front table, to Bigboy, Esther, Bianca and Simon for handing out flyers and to Jonathan, Deborah, Casper and Patricia Masamba for photos.

- For latest Vigil pictures check: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/zimbabwewigil/> . Please note: Vigil photos can only be downloaded from our Flickr website.

FOR THE RECORD: 36 signed the register.

EVENTS AND NOTICES:

- **ROHR Reading Branch outreach and general meeting.** Saturday 23rd March. Community outreach from 11.30 am – 1.30 pm. Venue: Broad street, Reading. Awareness campaign on deteriorating human rights in Zimbabwe. General meeting from 2 – 5 pm. Venue: The RISC, 35-39 London Street, Reading RG1 4PS. Contact: Sihle (Vice Chair) 07985712749, Josephine (Vice Organising Secretary) 07455166668, Shyllette (Vice Secretary) 0782892980.

- **ROHR general members' meeting.** Saturday 13th April from 11 am. Venue: Royal Festival Hall. Contact: Ephraim Tapa 07940793090, Patricia Masamba 07708116625.
 - **ROHR fundraising dinner.** Saturday 27th April from 6 – 11.30 pm. Venue Zazas, 108 Whitechapel Road, London E1 1JE. Contact: Siphobane 07400566013, Esther Munyira 07492058109, Fungisai Mupandira 07468504393, Casper Nyamakura 0757766912, Margaret Munenge 0739211743, Bianca Mpawaenda 07946230419 and Patricia Masamba 07708116625.
 - **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.
 - **MDC Reading Branch restructuring meeting.** Saturday 23rd March from 12 noon – 4 pm. Venue: RISC, 35-39 London Street, Reading RG1 4PS. Contacts: Charles Mararirakwenda 07588275745, Josephine Jombe 07455166668, Deborah Harry 07478894896.
 - **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 for £10. 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>