

Zimbabweans in the UK have enthusiastically engaged in the Brexit debate on whether the country should pull out of the European Union. Many have passionately taken sides – most, it appears, keen to stay in the Union.

Since the dangerously narrow victory of the Brexiteers in the referendum three years ago, there has been fierce debate on what would be best way for the nation to leave, not surprising since most members of parliament disagreed with the electorate.

But despite the differences there has been remarkably little violence – in contrast to the situation in neighbouring France, which has seen months of riots against the policies of President Macron, or the clashes in Germany involving the emergent right wing party opposed to Muslim immigration.

Despite the irritation and regret of the other 27 members of the EU at the UK's difficulty in reaching agreement on the type of post-Brexit relations it wants with them, there has been an unexpected side effect: fascination with the Britain's parliamentary system.

Television audiences in Germany, particularly, have been transfixed by scenes from the House of Commons, where 650 members of parliament have crowded in for boisterous, close-quarters debate. This audience has found it to be high drama, not just something to be exasperated by. It is democracy in action, not some dry, token, neat, pre-determined affair characteristic of hygienic European legislatures.

We Zimbabwean exiles in the UK still don't know how this drama will end. But following President Ramaphosa's visit to Zimbabwe we are profoundly depressed about how Zimbabwe's situation will turn out. Ramaphosa's refusal to even meet MDC president Chamisa seems to rule out hope of his playing a role in bringing about a dialogue between the rival parties in Zimbabwe. Not much democratic debate there – more the usual Afro-elite self-interest..

The Brexit debate has embraced all voices and tried to reach a consensus. This used to be known in Africa as Ubuntu. In the UK it has indeed taken time – but not nearly as long as Zimbabwe's failure to fully implement the 2013 constitution . . . And unlike in Zimbabwe, the UK

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has an economy which is buoyant, with employment at a record high, while Zimbabweans face the total collapse of the vestigial health service, where gynaecological oncologist Bothwell Guzha of Parirenyatwa Hospital said 'I am just seeing patients, make a diagnosis and send them away to die.' See:

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-zimbabwe-doctors/zimbabwe-doctors-say-patients-dying-due-to-drug-equipment-shortages-idUKKCN1QU2HT>

and

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPsHSV1Wpe0>

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Other points

- The Vigil supports a non-partisan initiative called 'Save our Hospitals' (see: <https://nehandaradio.com/2019/03/15/save-our-hospitals-initiative-launched-in-zimbabwe/>)

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- For a view of how the international media sees no change in Zimbabwe, see: <https://correspondent.afp.com/travels-through-zimbabwe>

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- On a day of fierce winds, thanks to those who came early to help set up the front table and put up the banners: Shylette Chipangura, Patrick Hale, Thomas Mahasoh, Gertrude Mudede, Agnes Mukumba, Farai Muroiwa, Tapiwa Muskwwe and Simon Nyanhi. Thanks to Farai and Shylette for looking after the front table, to Agnes, Gertrude, Thomas, Simon, Tinotenda Chihope and Collen Mupazviriho for handing out flyers and to Farai and Agnes 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: 16 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, Shylette (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

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Whitechapel Road, London E1 1JE. Contact: Siphobane 07400566013, Esther Munyira 07492058109, Fungisai Mupandira 07468504393, Casper Nyamakura 0757766912, Margaret Munenge 0739211743, Bianca Mpawaenda 07400566013 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.

- **MDC London Branch meeting.** Saturday 6th April from 12 noon – 2 pm. Venue: Royal Festival Hall. Contact: Netsai Makarichi 07592619201 and Flemming Diza 07960838847.

- **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>

The Vigil, outside the Zimbabwe Embassy, 429 Strand, London, takes place every Saturday from 14.00 to 17.00 to protest against gross violations of human rights in Zimbabwe. The Vigil which started in October 2002 will continue until internationally-monitored, free and fair elections are held in Zimbabwe. <http://www.zimvigil.co.uk> .