

There was a surprisingly big turnout given the freezing east wind. With the credit crunch there were fewer people around than normal, despite desperate post-Christmas sales. Sue of our management team, who helps woman the front table, was so cold she went off to buy a pair of long socks. She was struggling to put them on when one of the Vigil people – who works as a carer – came over and gave her a hand amid much hilarity.

Worried about our loved ones at home, we spent an anxious Christmas trying to work out what games Mugabe was playing with his cholera denial and abductions. It was good to be back together again to share information – and celebrate the first birthday of Mandla, another Vigil baby, son of Julius Mutyambizi and Addley Nyamutaka. We enjoyed his birthday cake. Patson Muzuwa said the Vigil was becoming a dating bureau given the number of marriages and offspring of people who had met outside the Embassy.

We had another South African passer-by who – initially supportive – was taken aback by our petition calling for the 2010 World Cup to be moved from South Africa. “I am not going to sign that” he said. We continue to be surprised that our South African friends think football is more important than Zimbabwean lives.

We were all depressed to hear that the UN had not collected enough money to feed Zimbabwe.

The Vigil again urges the European Union to help. The money needed could come from government-to-government aid from the EU to SADC countries.

Malawi

receives some £70m a year of this type of aid from Britain

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alone. The  
Malawi  
government is a great fan of Mugabe. Surely the  
UK  
could divert the money from  
Malawi  
to our desperate families in  
Zimbabwe  
. The Malawians could ask Mugabe for help instead . . . .

Nicolas Negoce of Vox Africa, a new French-African TV station, was with us and interviewed Luka Phiri of the Vigil management team. Another member of the team, Fungayi Mabhunu, is to do a studio interview with them later this week.

We were encouraged by a young man who came to us for the first time and said how much he had enjoyed being with us and he would bring friends to future Vigils. Another visitor was Jonathan Cox of the Citizens for Sanctuary Campaign who asked Chipso Chaya of the Vigil Management Team to get supporters to fill in CV forms. The plan is to hand over the CVs to the government to show that Zimbabweans have skills and want to work and make a contribution in the  
UK.

It has been a busy year and here's the first part of our annual report – the highlights of the first six months of the year – taken from the Vigil Diary. Next week we will do the same for July – December.

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\* **19th January** – A massive and very busy Vigil. We estimate that at least 500 were there, filling the entire piazza outside Zimbabwe House.

Among them were MDC members who had marched from Trafalgar Square

behind a huge banner “Zimbabweans want free and fair elections 2008”.

\* **16th February** – The Vigil was joined by activists from WOZA (Women of Zimbabwe Arise) marking the annual Valentine’s Day protest.

\* **17th February** – Vigil members attended a church service in Speldhurst, Kent, addressed by Sebastian Bakare, Bishop of Harare.

\* **8th March** – Singing and toy-toying behind placards reading ‘Dignity! Democracy Zimbabwe’, a stream of people joined the Vigil after a rally in Trafalgar Square

. The rally was organised by ACTSA (Action for Southern Africa

) on International Women’s Day in support of women in Zimbabwe

\* **29th March** – About 500 people came to the Vigil for our mock election. We were outside the Embassy from 6 am to 6 pm, with some people joining us from a Prayer Vigil for Zimbabwe at Southwark Cathedral. The focus of attention was Fungayi Mabhunu wearing a Mugabe mask and accompanied by Gugu Tutani-Ndlovu as Grace.

Fungayi really got into the swing of things, stuffing a giant ballot box with votes reading ‘Mugabe for Murder’, ‘Mugabe for Torture’, ‘Mugabe for Starvation’ etc.

\* **29th March** – launch of Glasgow Vigil. They meet every other week.

\* **17th-19th April** – Three days of demonstrations outside the Embassy culminated in the relaunch of the Vigil’s petition calling for action against the Southern African Development Community for their failure to hold Mugabe to agreed election protocols.

Several well-known musicians joined the Vigil, among them Lucky Moyo, formerly of Black Unfolozi, and Willard Karanga, formerly with Thomas Mapfumo’s band.

Vigil supporters were also out in force on Friday for a demonstration organised by Action for Southern Africa

, the successor to the Anti-Apartheid Movement, to mark Zimbabwe

’s Independence Day. There were also representatives of Zimbabwean youth groups who earlier

that day had invaded a meeting in London addressed by

Vice President

Ali Mohamed Shein of Tanzania, which is the current chair of the AU.

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They challenged him about the organisation's attitude to Zimbabwe

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The day before, on Thursday, the MDC in the UK

staged a protest against the rigged elections outside the Embassy and South Africa House.

Earlier in the week, on Tuesday, the Zimbabwe Embassy itself had been invaded by a group of Zimbabweans – all ladies except for one brave man.

\* **3rd May** – We got a lot of media coverage of our demonstration in protest at Mugabe's post-election reign of terror. Fugayi Mabhunu gave three television and radio interviews while Stendrick Zvorwadza of our partner organisation Restoration of Human Rights in Zimbabwe (ROHR) was on the radio a couple of times.

ROHR activists were at the Vigil in force to express their abhorrence of the violence being inflicted on opposition supporters.

\* **24th May** – The Vigil joined in a 'stand up for Zimbabwe' campaign organised by a coalition of African civil society organizations who are calling on people across the world to press the Southern African Development Community, African Union and the United Nations to act decisively to end systematic political violence in Zimbabwe. More than 200 people joined us.

We also held a mass 'lie down' as a way of graphically illustrating how many more people might die if the crisis isn't resolved. So many people wanted to take part that we had 3 waves of people lying down. .

\* **9th June** – The former Archbishop of Cape Town and Nobel laureate Desmond Tutu has asked for forgiveness on behalf of South Africa for the recent xenophobic violence against foreigners.

He was speaking

at St Martin-in-the-Fields,  
Trafalgar Square

.

Turning to Zimbabwe

, Archbishop Tutu said it used to be a showpiece in Africa

: "It has now turned into the most horrendous nightmare". He accepted a copy of a petition from the Vigil calling on President Mbeki to stop supporting Mugabe and allow a change of government in

Zimbabwe

so Zimbabwean exiles can return home.

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\* **12th June** – the Vigil protested outside the South Africa High Commission on the day when the Zimbabwe situation was to be discussed by the UN Security Council. Unsurprisingly, South Africa insisted that only the humanitarian situation be discussed: the political situation was not important enough.

The same attitude was reflected by the Hugh Commission, which initially refused to accept our petition to President Mbeki.

It was pointed out to them what bad public relations this was. Then they changed their mind and allowed one person to take the petition in to reception. Accompanying it was the following letter to President Mbeki: "We have been horrified by the recent xenophobic attacks on Zimbabweans and other foreigners in South Africa and enclose a petition signed on Saturday 7th June by people passing by the Zimbabwe Vigil. The situation can only get worse if Zanu PF is allowed to cling to power.

More and more Zimbabweans will have no choice but to flee." The demonstration made a strong impression on a Thursday lunch hour in Trafalgar Square

. The demonstration reached its height when, singing and dancing, all fingers were pointed at the South African High Commission.

\* **21st June** – Supporters had asked us to dedicate this Saturday as a prayer vigil and no one could fail to be moved by the outpouring of sorrow. Many thanks to Sally Sakala, a gospel musician and worshipper at God Solution Centre who led the impassioned prayers and hymn singing. We were happy to be joined by the Reverend Richard Carter of St Martin-in-the-Fields.

\* **23rd June** – A demonstration for democracy, rights and freedom for Zimbabwe organised by the TUC and ACTSA was supported by the Vigil.

\* **25th June** – Several Vigil supporters were among about a dozen demonstrators who gathered at Hyde Park as Nelson Mandela arrived for a dinner with leaders including Gordon Brown and former President Bill Clinton. They held up a banner saying "Mandela ignores Mugabe's terror. Shame", "Mandela speak out. Support a free Zimbabwe". They were pleased when Mr Mandela waved at them.

\* **26th June** – We had a wonderful encounter with Nelson Mandela today. Vigil management team member Fungayi Mabhunu joined human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell at Mr Mandela's hotel in London. They were there to alert people who might have pitched up for the planned picket cancelled because of Mr Mandela's welcome comments on the Zimbabwe situation. Fungayi, speaking in hastily-learned Xhosa, said how pleased he was that Mr Mandela had spoken out about Zimbabwe and asked him to continue speaking out. The Vigil had planned to picket the concert for Mr Mandela's 90th birthday in

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Hyde Park

on Friday but in view of his support any message that we will give will be one of gratitude that he has spoken out.

\* **26th June** – A Service of Solidarity with Torture Survivors of Zimbabwe on UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture organised by the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum was supported by the Vigil.

\* **27th June** -- On Election Run-off day some 150 people gathered outside the Zimbabwe Embassy to protest against the death of democracy in Zimbabwe. The centre-piece of the demonstration was a black-draped coffin which was presented to the nearby South African High Commission, containing a second tranche of our petition calling on President Mbeki to stop supporting Mugabe.

The South Africans would not allow our nominated person to present the petition because he was wearing our Mugabe mask so it was presented instead by his dear wife Grace dressed from top-to-toe in Harrods.

The crowd outside the High Commission shouted “Mbeki must go, Mbeki out, out, out”. Vigil supporters had walked from the Zimbabwe Embassy to the South African High Commission behind the coffin.

They carried placards reading “Died for Democracy in Zimbabwe

.”

Next week: our report on the second half of 2008 and the growth of ROHR.

For latest Vigil pictures check our pictures page.

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**FOR THE RECORD:** 145 signed the register.

FOR YOUR DIARY:

\***Next Glasgow Vigil.** Saturday, 3rd January 2008, 2 – 6 pm. Venue: Argyle Street Precinct.

For more information contact: Patrick Dzimba, 07990 724 137

, Tafadzwa Musemwa 07954 344 123 and Roggers Fatiya 07769 632 687.

\* **ROHR Bournemouth Members' Meeting.** Saturday, 3rd January 2009 at East Cliff

Reformed Church,

Idenhurst Road

,

Bournemouth

BH8 8AW

. The meeting is from 12.30 – 14.30 and is followed by a march and fundraising at the town square. Contact Tina - 07886707953, Abi - 07917458873 or Mr Mapfumo -

07932216070/07533831617.

\* **Citizens for Sanctuary Campaign for Zimbabweans to be allowed to work.** On Tuesday, 13th January 2009

they will be handing over Zimbabwean CVs to

10 Downing Street

.

To obtain a CV form contact Jonathan Cox,

Lead Organiser and Director of

CITIZENS for Sanctuary,

[jonathan.cox@cof.org.uk](mailto:jonathan.cox@cof.org.uk)

, 07919 484066. Deadline for CVs is 5th January.

\* **Unite Zimnite.** Saturday, 24th January 2009 at 7 pm. King's College London's student-led charity Project

Zimbabwe

is holding a fundraiser for

Zimbabwe

. The event is an African themed open mic night with over 8 acts coming to perform.

Money raised will go towards their MedYouth Project, a life skills programme being taught to school children in

Bulawayo

next summer. Venue: Function Room, Walkabout,

Temple

. Cost: £10/£5NUS. For more information, check:

<http://www.kclprojectzimbabwe.blogspot.com/>

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\* **Zimbabwe Association's Women's Weekly Drop-in Centre.** Fridays 10.30 am – 4 pm.

Venue: The Fire Station

Community and ICT Centre,

84 Mayton Street

,  
London

N7 6QT, Tel: 020 7607 9764. Nearest underground:

Finsbury

Park

. For more information contact the Zimbabwe Association 020 7549 0355 (open Tuesdays and Thursdays).