

Zimbabwe Vigil – Highlights of 2008

Written by Administrator

Thursday, 29 January 2009 19:56 - Last Updated Monday, 27 April 2009 12:23

Here is a synopsis of the highlights of the Zimbabwe Vigil for 2008

- 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

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, 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.

They challenged him about the organisation's attitude to Zimbabwe

.

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

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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.

· 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 freed 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 please when Mr Mandela waved at them.

* 26th June - We had a wonderful encounter with Nelson Mandela today. Vigil management

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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 of Mr Mandela's 90th birthday in Hyde Park on Friday but in view of his support any message 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

."

- 5th July – A big crowd attended the Vigil to launch our new petition calling on FIFA to move the World Cup from South Africa: "With the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe and the likelihood of unrest spreading to South Africa we call upon FIFA to move the 2010 World Cup from South Africa to a safer venue. By the time the World Cup takes place South Africa's support of the Mugabe regime will have made the whole region unsafe because millions more refugees will flee Zimbabwe prompting further xenophobic violence in neighbouring countries."
- 11th July - Vigil members took a leading role today in a service at Parliament's own parish church, St Margaret's, next to Westminster Abbey, addressed by the Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu. The occasion was a service of prayer for the people of Zimbabwe called 'Restore Zimbabwe'. Chipo Chaya and Luka Phiri of the Vigil management team read a lesson in Shona and Ndebele respectively. Chipo also conducted the Zimbabwean choir and Vigil Co-ordinator Dumi Tutani led dancing below the altar. Vigil members gave testimony as 'Voices of Zimbabwe'.
- 8th August 2008 - There was big media attendance at the joint demonstration outside the

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Chinese Embassy in London to coincide with the opening of the Olympic Games in Beijing.

Television teams from British and foreign news organisations spent four hours with us.

It was an uplifting experience working with other oppressed peoples in protest at China's support of dictators. It is difficult to say how many people attended because the Burmese and Tibetans mobilised at different times but the Zimbabweans and Darfurians were there from beginning to end.

A highlight was a symbolic tableau depicting Mugabe, Bashir of Sudan and Than Shwe of Burma chained to a figure representing China against the backdrop of a black coffin representing the millions of victims of the three dictators.

· 20th September - Our doubts about the power-sharing agreement seem to have been borne out. The word we get from relatives and friends is that ZANU-PF seem to have no understanding of what power-sharing means.

Vigil representatives went to a meeting in London on Tuesday (16/9) organised by the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum. It was addressed by Jenni Williams of WOZA and

Abel Chikomo, Executive Director of the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum.

A few people expressed misgivings about the power-sharing arrangement but Jenni and Abel and most of the audience were reasonably optimistic. (We weren't.)

· 11th October - Friends from times past joined us in brilliant sunshine for the Vigil to launch our 7th year outside the Embassy. Unfortunately Glenys Kinnock MEP was unable to be with us to receive our petition to the EU so we sending it to Brussels by post: Letter to the European Union

"The Zimbabwe Vigil wishes to submit a petition calling on European Union countries to suspend government-to-government aid

to members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) because of their failure to help the suffering people of Zimbabwe. As you will see, the petition has been signed by thousands of people from all over the world who have recently passed by our Vigil and share our anxiety about the crisis in our homeland. The Vigil condemns SADC for recognising Mugabe as President when SADC's own election observers criticised the polls this year as deeply flawed. Mugabe consequently feels free to disregard a power-sharing deal signed last month -- despite the deepening humanitarian crisis. The Vigil wants the money saved by our proposal -- and it amounts to many hundreds of millions of pounds a year -- to be used to finance refugee camps in South Africa, Botswana, Zambia and Mozambique to which Zimbabweans can flee for their lives without fear of prompting more xenophobic violence.

· 1st November - Vigil supporters were shocked by the murder of Osborne Kachuru of RO HR. He was

beaten to death at ZANU PF's offices in Fourth Street, Harare, after a peaceful demonstration during the SADC talks on Monday. We are told that the Zanu PF political commissar Eliot Manyika was responsible and the Vigil swears to leave no stone unturned to make sure he eventually faces justice.

(Press Report: "Elliot Manyika, the ZANU PF political commissar whose name is synonymous

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with violence, died on Saturday (6/12) following a road accident along the Zvishavane-Mbalabala road.”)

* 26th November - Open letter from the Zimbabwe Vigil to South Africa and the Elders The dishonesty, hypocrisy and ignorance emerging from South Africa in the past week stabs at the heart of all those working for democracy in Zimbabwe.

The group of three ‘Elders’ spent a couple of days in South Africa talking about Zimbabwe and say they have been shocked by what they have learnt. Where have they been for the past 10 years? Have they read nothing, heard nothing?

Even though they were not allowed into Zimbabwe, they submitted a report to South Africa’s President Motlanthe. He says he was shocked by the report and talks about ‘quibbling over ministries’. Where has he been for the past 10 years? Has he read nothing, heard nothing? They say the situation is desperate – and so it is – but it is not helped by this dishonesty, hypocrisy and ignorance.

They say the Zimbabwean party leaders must put aside their differences and join in a power-sharing government to resolve the crisis in Zimbabwe – as if another short-sighted and deceitful agreement like the one signed in September will do anything to improve the situation.

For our part the Vigil wants to see:

1)

No recognition of Mugabe’s illegitimate regime.

2)

Neighbouring countries to refuse visas to members of the regime.

3)

A freeze on the assets of members of the regime.

4)

UN sanctions on the regime.

5)

The establishment of refugee camps in countries bordering Zimbabwe where desperate Zimbabweans can seek food, medical attention, shelter and education no longer available at home.

· 6th December 2008 - The leader of the UK Liberal Democrat Party, Nick Clegg MP, visited the Vigil and called for international action to oust Mugabe.

Addressing Vigil supporters, Mr Clegg condemned the brutality of the Mugabe regime. He said it was a stain on the conscience of the world. The UN, he said, must take any measures necessary to remove Mugabe. The Lib Dem leader paid tribute to the persistence of the Vigil and declared ‘you will prevail in the end’.

· 20th December 2008 - There was massive media presence because of the juxtaposition of cholera and Christmas. We were particularly pleased to have the SABC with us because our main message is addressed to South Africa.

We are encouraged that the rest of the world seems to be coming around to our view – both our petitions are aimed at pressing South Africa to take action against Mugabe. Father Cholera had an exhausting time sweating behind his Mugabe mask. When he appeared in his Santa Claus outfit he was mobbed by television crews (Sky, CNN, Channel 4, Aljazeera and others). He cut down from

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the trees beautifully wrapped Christmas presents and handed them to Vigil supporters representing the people of Zimbabwe. They were labelled:
cholera, anthrax, starvation, hunger, violence, murder, rape, torture, greed, injustice, destruction, death, corruption, lies, inflation, AIDS, malaria, devastation, kleptocracy, terror.