

## No Returns before Elections!

Written by Administrator

Thursday, 28 October 2010 18:38 - Last Updated Thursday, 28 October 2010 18:42

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About 300 Zimbabweans gathered at Lancaster House in London on 27<sup>th</sup> October for a meeting to hear a senior Home Office official Phil Douglas answer questions on the sudden ending of the four year moratorium on sending home failed Zimbabwean asylum seekers.

He dismissed fears that the move would influence the decision of a team of judges presently considering the Zimbabwe country guidance case and insisted that independent courts would continue to decide on individual asylum cases.

Few of his audience were satisfied by his explanations. There was laughter when Mr Douglas said that returned people could relocate to different areas. Many people expressed fears of renewed violence during next year's elections. There was a cry of 'blood on your hands'. And there was applause when Ephraim Tapa, President of the Restoration of Human Rights in Zimbabwe (ROHR), suggested that any returns should be delayed until after the elections.

It was agreed there was a need for further dialogue on the policy and it was proposed that there should be a further meeting in November. The British government team suggested that Zimbabwean concerns about the policy should be channelled through an organisation of their creation, the Zimbabwe Diaspora Focus Group. There were a couple of members of this group present but most of the others were from the Vigil, ROHR and the MDC.

The Zimbabwe Vigil / ROHR's views are that they do not want to be represented by any other group and this was reaffirmed at a briefing after the meeting to the large group of Zimbabweans who had waited patiently outside, being unable to get into the meeting, and had continued a lively protest behind the Vigil banners 'No to Mugabe, No to Starvation' and 'End Murder, Rape and Torture in Zimbabwe'. They included a Vigil supporter from Glasgow J

osiah Sibanda

who applied for registration to attend but did not get a reply. Josephine Zhuga, who was to present a petition to Mr Douglas, was also denied entry.

It was agreed to begin a wide consultation exercise in readiness for any further engagements with the UK Border Agency. Ephraim Tapa was chosen to co-ordinate this process and liaise with other concerned Zimbabwean groups in the

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UK

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We ended with prayers for our troubled country.

(Mr Douglas agreed to accept our petition and hand it on. It reads: '**Petition to the Home Secretary, the Honourable Theresa May:**

We the undersigned, members of the Zimbabwean Diaspora in the UK and sympathisers, express our grave disquiet at the UK government's announcement that failed Zimbabwean asylum seekers are to be deported – even before the hearing of a test (country guidance) case is concluded.

Our view is that the situation in Zimbabwe

is not suitable for the return of exiled Zimbabweans, especially those who have shown their rejection of the Zimbabwean regime by applying for asylum in the UK

. In particular, we are aware of continuing widespread acts of political violence by Zanu PF agents who enjoy immunity from prosecution. We fear the situation is likely to worsen given plans to hold new elections next year.')