

Despite the brilliant late summer weather in London, all the talk at the Vigil was about the gloomy situation at home. We all had stories to recount of starvation and the collapse of the health and education systems. A supporter reported that his mother in Mbare says she has permanent diarrhoea. Even boiling the water doesn't help. As for schools, it looks like 2008 is going to be wipe-out year no teachers, no exams.. Our lives are on hold.

[flickr photo=2894739719 size=small align=left vspace=10 hspace=10] On 11th October we will mark our 6th anniversary outside the Zimbabwe Embassy. With the refusal of Zanu-PF to honour the power-sharing agreement, we want to draw the attention of the international media to the plight of Zimbabwe. We are planning to mark the day by handing over our petition demanding EU action to alleviate the suffering in Zimbabwe. The petition reads: "A Petition to European Union Governments. We record our dismay at the failure of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to help the desperate people of Zimbabwe at their time of trial. We urge the UK government and the European Union in general to suspend government-to-government aid to all 14 SADC countries until they abide by their joint commitment to uphold human rights in the region. We suggest that the money should instead be used to feed the starving in Zimbabwe"

To explain: we are not, of course, calling for a halt to humanitarian aid. . . . food, medicine etc. On the contrary, we want this increased to meet the desperate demand. What we are talking about is government-to-government balance of payments support. We want this money, and it amounts to many hundreds of millions of pounds a year, to be used instead to finance refugee camps in South Africa, Botswana, Zambia and Mozambique to which Zimbabweans can flee for their lives without fear of prompting xenophobic violence. The money would be used to fund food, shelter, medicine and education no longer available in Zimbabwe.

We believe SADC has failed to live up to its basic responsibilities and must share the pain of Zimbabwe as it becomes the country of the dead, the dying and Zanu-PF. We are grateful that Botswana and Zambia have recently begun to protest about what is happening but our proposal will benefit them in relieving their refugee burden. Our petition to the European Union was today signed by three Italian trade union leaders who passed by the Vigil on their way to a conference.

We have updated our flyer for the passing public to read: "The Zimbabwe Vigil calls on the United Nations, the African Union and the Southern African Development Community to take measures to halt the violence in Zimbabwe and enable a peaceful handover of power to the

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Movement for Democratic Change, which won the March elections. Despite signing a power-sharing agreement the Mugabe regime has not changed its ways and seeks to cling to office. Violence continues against opposition supporters, fanned by hate speech in the Mugabe-controlled media. Zimbabwe leads the world: highest inflation rate, lowest life expectancy, most orphans per capita, fastest shrinking economy and worst torture record. The Vigil urges South Africa to end its support of the illegitimate Mugabe regime.”

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