

Written by Administrator
Sunday, 05 January 2014 18:07 -

We at the first Vigil of 2014 were spared the worst of the storm which saw flooding in many parts of the UK. But it was still a bracing challenge spending four hours outside the Embassy protected only by a tarpaulin strung between four trees.

It was our 12th New Year protesting outside Zimbabwe House and, despite our singing and dancing, dispiriting to see things get progressively worse at home. The Botswana-based Zimbabwean political commentator Tanonoka Whande now goes as far as to suggest the outcome might be violence (Yet another year of misery – Tononoka Joseph Whande – http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/news/zimsit_yet-another-year-of-misery-creeps/).

People often ask us why we go on when our demand for free and fair elections is denied time after time by Zanu PF chicanery, regional connivance and international indifference. The answer is that we are determined to keep up awareness of the plight of Zimbabweans. How we do this is shown in our annual summary of Vigil highlights drawn from the weekly Vigil diaries. The first part of the 2013 summary, covering the first three months of 2013, is given below. The rest of the year will be included in other diaries this month.

Other points

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The Vigil thanks supporters for their help in 2013 and wishes them the best for the coming year.

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Thanks particularly to those who came early on such a threatening day to help set up: Danai Magidhi (who balanced precariously on our table to tie the ropes for the tarpaulin), Helen Rukambiro and Ishmael Makina. Thanks also to ROHR Slough branch which held their meeting early so members (Patricia Masamba and Grace Nyaumwe) could come to the Vigil.

Zimbabwe Vigil Highlights 2013

Saturday 5th January 2013: The first Vigil of the New Year was auspicious if only because it didn't rain! (2012 had been the wettest year since English records began.) The Vigil diary noted that the exiled Zimbabwean writer Chenjerai Hove reflected the Vigil's view that there had been no improvement on the election situation of 2008. 'Mugabe's party has not changed its approach one inch' he said. 'As the country faints under heavy economic and political burdens, the politicians would rather punch the air with empty slogans and worthless promises that are so unrealistic that even illiterate villagers wonder how a politician can be so dumb as to promise a bridge where there is not even a river'.

Saturday 12th January: On a bitterly cold day the Vigil kept warm by laughing at the reported remarks by Finance Minister Tendai Biti at a Zimbabwe investment conference here in London. 'Reported' remarks because we couldn't afford to go to the meeting to hear for ourselves at a cost of £90 for the cheapest ticket. Biti apparently said that Zimbabwe had become 'a safe and lucrative place to come and invest in' and was 'pregnant with opportunities' . . .

Saturday 19th January: The Vigil delivered a petition to the South African High Commission in London appealing to President Zuma to ensure that international observers were sent to Zimbabwe for the upcoming elections and calling on him to get tough with Mugabe. Vigil founder member Ephraim Tapa said the diaspora were the victims of South Africa's failure to broker peace. Ephraim and David Kadzutu of our partner organisation Zimbabwe Yes We Can attended the first of the year's bi-monthly Zimbabwe Action Forums held after the Vigil. They outlined the aims of the forum which they said was envisaged as an umbrella group like the Anti-apartheid Movement embracing all Zimbabweans working for freedom and democracy.

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Saturday 26th January: The Vigil sent an open letter to Chatham House, the influential London international affairs think tank, protesting at not being allowed to attend a meeting to discuss a contentious book defending Mugabe's land policy 'Zimbabwe takes back its land'.

Thursday 31st January: Vigil supporters demonstrated outside Chatham House. We had consulted leading economists in Zimbabwe for their opinions on the assertions made in the book so we were able to make available to people going into the meeting the facts the authors had ignored. A friend who managed to get in noted in an email to us: 'Irony of whites on the platform largely justifying what happened after the land invasions and blacks outside protesting'.

Saturday 2nd February: One of the authors of the book, Dr Joseph Hanlon, came to a meeting of the Zimbabwe Action Forum after the Vigil to defend the book. He had a rough ride. Nobody accepted his arguments. Daizy Fabian said: 'My father was a farmer but we were taken over and lost everything and we're not white we're black!'

Saturday 9th February: Every week sees the 'credibility gap' between Harare and the outside world grow wider. This week we were told by Tendai Biti that the elections will be free and fair – despite the failure to implement any of the GPA reforms. We think Biti should ask his new friend Gideon Gono to see what his prophet pals can do. Gono obviously thinks nothing is beyond their miraculous money making powers. Or Biti could bet his last \$217 (said to be all that was left in the Treasury) on free and fair elections – the Vigil will give him a million to one.

Saturday 16th February: The Vigil met earlier than usual to support an Amnesty International protest on behalf of WOZA. The Vigil displayed a poster protesting at the brutal treatment of WOZA at their Valentine Day's demonstrations in Harare and Bulawayo. Roses were laid on the doorstep of the Embassy.

Saturday 23rd February: On another cold day, we were surprised to be joined outside the Embassy by President Mugabe, tearing himself away from his 89th birthday celebrations. Thanks to Fungayi Mabhunu who played the role of Mugabe in our mask, dozing off under the snowflakes. Vigil supporters tied him to his chair with the SADC bonds which we hope will produce free and fair elections: 'International Observers', 'Curbs on Partisan Security Forces', 'Impartial Electoral Commission', 'Reformed Voters' Roll', 'No Hate Speech' and 'Open Airways'. Vigil supporters then trooped off to the South African High Commission to deliver a letter for President Zuma warning him that unless the GPA reforms are implemented

there is no hope that Mugabe will allow free and fair elections.

Saturday 2nd March: The Vigil urged the United Nations not to finance the Zimbabwean elections unless UN monitors are allowed to attend. We said in a letter to the UN Development Programme: *'The Zimbabwe Vigil understands that the Zimbabwe government has asked you to pay for the coming elections as it says it has no money. At the same time, Vice President Joice Mujuru has insisted that only observers from Southern Africa will be invited to monitor the elections. We believe that President Mugabe's Zanu PF cronies have syphoned off billions of dollars of diamond revenue and that the President could easily arrange to finance the elections. But if the UNDP is of a mind to squander donors' money on the Zimbabwean elections we believe it should be conditional on UN observers being allowed to monitor them. We suggest that the observers should be drawn from those countries such as the US and EU members which provide most of the funds.'* Mart
in Chinyanga, who has launched a campaign 'Diaspora Feels It', joined us at the Zimbabwe Action Forum following
the Vigil after laying flowers on the doorstep of the Embassy in memory of 12-year-old Christpower Maisiri who was murdered by Zanu PF.

Thursday 7th March: 19 Vigil supporters attended a Mike Campbell Foundation event 'Hope in a Desert' at the prestigious Royal Geographical Society. The meeting was chaired by Kate Hoey MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Committee on Zimbabwe, who paid tribute to the work of the Vigil. One of the speakers at the meeting was Dr Craig Richardson, an American associate professor of economics, who spoke of the importance of property rights for the future of the Zimbabwean economy. The executive director of the Foundation Ben Freeth, criticized two recent books by British academics which he said were white-washing the agricultural situation.

Saturday 9th March 2013: The likelihood of election violence in Zimbabwe has prompted a petition to the British Government by Restoration of Human Rights in Zimbabwe (ROHR) and the Vigil to protest at the deportation of Zimbabwean failed asylum seekers ahead of the elections.

Saturday 16th March: The main event of the day was the presentation of our petition to 10 Downing Street. Earlier, more than 100 Zimbabwean exiles gathered outside the Zimbabwe Embassy to mark Referendum Day. We were joined by Mark Beacon of Action for Southern Africa (ACTSA), formerly the Anti-Apartheid Movement, who said a peaceful referendum was no guide to what would happen in the elections. He insisted that for the elections to be credible there would have to be an accurate voters' roll and international as well

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as regional observers. People were invited to write messages of hope for free and fair elections on red paper roses which were deposited in a voting box. The only sour note was cast by President Mugabe (played by Fungayi Mabhunu in our Mugabe mask) who, asked to vote for freedom, voted no.

Fungayi later summed up the Vigil's view: 'The referendum is a charade. President Mugabe has once again outwitted the Movement for Democratic Change. Four years and more than \$100 million have been wasted on this defective constitution when what is really needed is action to ensure free and fair elections'. After the Vigil Mark Beacon joined us at a well-attended forum at which we discussed how we could work together.

Saturday 23rd March: Spring snow didn't stop us as we trailed around central London visiting various embassies to protest against the harassment of those opposing Zimbabwe's police state. Displaying posters such as 'Free Beatrice Mtetwa', 'Stop harassment of Zimbabwean human rights groups', 'End police lawlessness' and 'Restore rule of law in Zimbabwe', we first delivered a letter to the High Commission of Tanzania, the Chair of the SADC Security Troika. A copy of the letter was also left at the High Commission of South Africa, the SADC facilitator on Zimbabwe, and at the Zimbabwe Embassy.

Tuesday 26th March: Vigil activists gathered outside a meeting in London between Zimbabwe's Justice Minister Chinamasa and the international donor group Friends of Zimbabwe. The activists displayed posters such as: 'Britain don't give in to Mugabe' and 'No money unless rule of law'. Our supporters shouted 'thief' and 'murderer' when Chinamasa emerged from the talks.

Saturday 30th March: One of the Vigil founders, Patson Muzuwa, reported that he had managed to smuggle himself into the Zimbabwe Embassy for a meeting on Friday attended by the three- person Zimbabwe delegation representing the GNU partners. Patson said it was clear that the delegation only wanted to meet selected members of the diaspora and people had tried to shut him up when he insisted on asking questions. When Chinamasa asked whether people had been ill-treated by Zanu PF, Patson dismayed everyone by standing up and saying 'Yes, I have been tortured'. Patson added that Chinamasa made racist remarks, saying Zimbabweans didn't want whites, and also made it clear that he didn't want Zimbabweans returning home.

For latest Vigil pictures check: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/zimbabwевigil/> . Please note: Vigil

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photos can only be downloaded from our Flickr website.

FOR THE RECORD: 30 signed the register.

EVENTS AND NOTICES:

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Next Swaziland Vigil. Saturday 11th January from 10 am to 1 pm outside the Swaziland High Commission, 20 Buckingham Gate, London SW1E 6LB.

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Zimbabwe Yes We Can meeting. Saturday 18th January from 12 noon. Venue: Strand Continental Hotel (first floor lounge), 143 Strand, London WC2R 1JA. The Strand is the same road as the Vigil. From the Vigil it's about a 10 minute walk, in the direction away from Trafalgar Square. The Strand Continental is situated on the south side of the Strand between Somerset House and the turn off onto Waterloo Bridge. The entrance is marked by a big sign high above and a sign for its famous Indian restaurant at street level. It's next to a newsagent. Nearest underground: Temple (District and Circle lines) and Holborn.

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Zimbabwe Action Forum (ZAF). Saturday 18th January 2014 from 6.15 pm. Venue: Strand Continental Hotel (first floor lounge), 143 Strand, London WC2R 1JA. For directions see entry above.

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Zimbabwe Vigil Highlights 2012 can be viewed on this link: <http://www.zimvigil.co.uk/the-vigil-diary/467-vigil-highlights-2012>

Links to previous years' highlights are listed on 2012 Highlights page.

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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 the views and opinions of ROHR.

Facebook pages:

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Vigil: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=8157345519&ref=ts>

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ZAF: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Zimbabwe-Action-Forum-ZAF/490257051027515>

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ROHR: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/ROHR-Zimbabwe-Restoration-of-Human-Rights/301811392835>

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Zimbabweans United for Democracy (ZUNDE). For more information about this organisation, check: www.zunde.org.

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