

Progress? – Zimbabwe Vigil Diary: 24th January 2015

Written by Administrator
Sunday, 25 January 2015 14:41 -

Zimbabweans in the UK have welcomed the prospect of a parliamentary debate on the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe as a means of questioning the British policy of re-engaging with Mugabe.

'We want the British government to tell us what they mean by progress in Zimbabwe' said Ephraim Tapa, President of Restoration of Human Rights in Zimbabwe (ROHR). He was referring to a remark by former Africa Minister Mark Simmonds at a meeting in Parliament on Monday which was organised by the MP for Reading West, Alok Sharma, after being approached by ROHR's Reading branch.

Mr Sharma, hearing the anxieties expressed by the large number of Zimbabweans, raised the possibility of a parliamentary debate because it was some years since Zimbabwe had last been discussed in Parliament.

The idea was supported by Mr Simmonds, one of two other MPs who attended the meeting. He said the British government had a policy of 'incremental engagement with the Zimbabwean government' even though it was clear that the 2013 elections had not been legitimate.

He said there was concern in the region about the situation and there would be 'real problems' for Zimbabwe's international relations if Grace became president. Nevertheless, Mr Simmonds

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spoke of 'small steps of progress', echoing the official British and EU diplomatic line.

Ephraim Tapa and others argued that Zimbabwe remained in crisis with rampant corruption, a compromised judiciary, a culture of impunity, with the regime being backed by the military and violence remaining a tool of control. After the meeting, Ephraim elaborated: 'Mr Simmonds spoke of progress but there has been no progress. The situation has clearly worsened since the 2013 elections. Yes, there is a new constitution but it has not been implemented and Zanu PF is tearing itself apart with no idea how to get out of the massive hole it has dug itself into'.

But Ephraim welcomed the idea of a parliamentary debate. 'It is necessary to interrogate the British government's policy as it is not at all clear what it hopes to achieve'. Millions of pounds of British taxpayers' money in aid was helping prop up the regime.

He urged Zimbabweans in the UK to enlist the support of their local MP to back the suggestion of a debate. A meeting of the Zimbabwe Action Forum is to be held after the Vigil on 7th February to discuss a template letter outlining reasons why Zimbabwe should be discussed in Parliament.

Despite the claimed 'progress' in Zimbabwe the Vigil notes the following comments in the Foreign Office's latest update on Zimbabwe (see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/zimbabwe-country-of-concern/zimbabwe-country-of-concern-latest-update-31-december-2014>

Zimbabwe - country of concern: latest update 31 December 2014):

The UK government remains concerned about politically-inspired violence and harassment, repressive legislation and limited media freedom

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Progress to align legislation with the constitution remains disappointingly slow and limited to less sensitive areas

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We are concerned by the continued use of oppression by police to stop legitimate peaceful protests and to limit freedom of expression

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We are particularly concerned by incidents of reported hate speech used by the First Lady Grace Mugabe. On 6 October, Grace Mugabe was quoted as saying that she would “spill blood” if anyone attempted to remove her from her Mazoe farm, illegally appropriated from a white commercial farm owner

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We continue to remain concerned by the general lack of respect for the rule of law in Zimbabwe, particularly over property rights and security of land tenure

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Individuals, particularly those with a high profile, remain encouraged to take the law into their own hands.

This is progress?

In his remarks to the meeting Mr Simmonds noted ‘some African countries are starting to get it right and serve the people’. He mentioned Mozambique among others in the region and the Vigil welcomes comments by Mozambique’s new President Filipe Nyusi (see: http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/news/zimsit_w_the-people-are-my-only-boss-nyusi/)

). In his first speech as Head of State, President Nyusi said he was open to considering proposals from opposition political parties. “Good ideas have no political party colours”, he said. He pledged “respect for plurality and diversity of opinions”. Nobody would be left out just because they thought differently. We remember when Mozambique used to be the poor relation of Zimbabwe. Now the situation is reversed.

(In a quick report on Monday’s meeting we mentioned it had been addressed by a representative of the Occupy Africa Unity Square group. We apologise for getting his name wrong – he is David Mbinga not David Mbeki.)

Other points

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MDC-T is joining with the Vigil and other organisations to stage a demonstration on 21st February – Mugabe's 91st birthday – protesting at the failure of his government and his refusal to hold free and fair elections. More details to come. Now that Mugabe is at home recovering from his holiday there is speculation about where his final resting place will be. One suggestion is the Zimbabwe ruins.

We have been invited to the British premiere of a film 'Democrats' by a Danish filmmaker on 5th February about the process of drawing up the new Zimbabwe constitution. For more information see:

<http://www.dochose.org/film-screening/DEMOCRATS---UK-Premiere--QandA-with/417>

The Vigil has been asked by Paul Westwood to draw attention to his petition about the seizure of his company by Temba Mliswa, nephew of Didymus Mutasa. See: <http://twitter.com/PaulPaulus13/status/464388746599620609> . Perhaps Mr Westwood could pursue the Mutasa girlfriends now in Europe who were given looted farms (s

ee:

http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/news/zimsit_w_ex-minister-gave-15-farms-to-wives-lovers-the-sunday-mail/

Ex-minister gave 15 farms to wives, lovers).

Thanks to those who came early to help set up: Mavis Chisvo, Rachel Mudzimba, Ravie Mashingaidze, Paul Fusire and Fungayi Mabhunu. Thanks to Mavis and Helen Rukimbiro for looking after the Vigil table throughout the afternoon.

For latest Vigil pictures check: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/zimbabwevigil/> . Please note: Vigil photos can only be downloaded from our Flickr website.

FOR THE RECORD: 24 signed the register.

EVENTS AND NOTICES:

Zimbabwe Yes We Can meeting. Saturday 31st January at 12 noon. Venue: The Theodore Bullfrog, 26-30 John Adam Street, London WC2N 6HL.

Zimbabwe Yes We Can Movement holds monthly meetings in London as the political face of ROHR and the Vigil.

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Next Swaziland Vigil. Saturday 31st January from 10 am to 1 pm outside the Swaziland High Commission, 20 Buckingham Gate, London SW1E 6LB.

Film 'Democrats'. Thursday 5th February at 6.10 pm. Venue: Curzon Victoria, 58 Victoria Street, London SW1E 6QW. A film about the process of drawing up the new Zimbabwe constitution. For more information see: <http://www.dochohouse.org/film-screening/DEMOCRATS---UK-Premiere--QandA-with/417>

Zimbabwe Action Forum (ZAF). Saturday 7th February from 6.15 pm. Venue: Strand Continental Hotel (first floor lounge), 143 Strand, London WC2R 1JA. 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 sign at street level. It's between a newsagent and Pizza Express. Nearest underground: Temple (District and Circle lines) and Holborn.

Zimbabwe Action Forum (ZAF) meets regularly after the Vigil to discuss ways to help those back in Zimbabwe to fight oppression and achieve true democracy.

Mugabe birthday protest. Saturday 21st February from 2 – 6 pm. Venue: outside the Zimbabwe Embassy, 429 Strand, London WC2R 0JR. More information to follow.

ROHR Slough Branch general meeting. Saturday 21st February 2015 from 11.30 am – 2 pm. Venue: Upton Lea Community Hall, Wexham Road, Slough SL2 5JW. For further information contact Patricia Masamba (Chair) 07708116625, Nkosi Tshabangu (Vice-Chair) 07535942709, Fungisai Mupandira (Organising Secretary) 07758958803,

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 us.

Zimbabwe Vigil Highlights 2014 can be viewed on this link: <http://www.zimvigil.co.uk/vigil-news/campaign-news/642-zimbabwe-vigil-highlights-2014>. Links to previous years' highlights are listed on 2014 Highlights page.

Facebook pages:

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>

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

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SW Radio Africa's website and sound archive is being hosted on www.archive.org . Go to their site and type in swradioafrica which will link you to snapshots of their site over the years and at the top of that page a link to their website where, under podcasts, you will find the audio.