

As we spent another Christmas in exile we were surprised to hear from the United Nations that 'Zimbabwe had done tremendously well' on the human rights front. We would never have known this if the Herald had not carried an article by the UN's acting resident co-ordinator Dr David Okello.

**The Herald quoted him as saying: 'Zimbabwe has made tremendous strides in living the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' (see: <http://www.herald.co.zw/human-rights-zim-has-done-extremely-well/>).**

Dr Okello, who is the World Health Organisation's representative in Zimbabwe, went on: 'The right to health care, food and nutrition, education, water and sanitation, social security, to political participation and the fair administration of justice are all fulfilled for all members of society.'

We at the Vigil are a bit mystified by the article because, as far as we can make out, the exact opposite is the case in Zimbabwe. But then we recalled that last January the UN put Zimbabwean unemployment at 5.42% - surprising not only for its precision but also for its complete lunacy (see Vigil diary of 31<sup>st</sup> January 2015).

## Mugabe's happy Christmas – Zimbabwe Vigil Diary: 26th December 2015

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The latest UN ravings must have cheered Mugabe as he set off for his annual holiday in the Far East after a celebratory banquet at State House for Zanu PF bigwigs. Acting President Phelekezela Mphoko gushed: 'Sir, you have directed the party par excellence, you have directed the Government par excellence, you have directed Sadc par excellence and you are directing the African Union par excellence!' (See: <http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/news/zim-sit-m-bob-in-xmas-party-while-many-starve/> ).

### Other points

- On our last Vigil of the year a few brave souls managed to get to the Embassy despite the diminished transport on Boxing Day. They were heartened by a regular benefactor who once again gave a generous donation
- Below you can find the first of three summaries of the 2015 Vigil diaries. It covers highlights from the first four months of the year. We will print the rest over the next two weeks.

### Zimbabwe Vigil Highlights: January – April 2015

**Dead hand at the tiller – Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> January:** On a cold and wet day we staged a little tableau inspired by pictures of Mugabe's holiday feast in Singapore, with Fungayi Mabhunu donning our Mugabe mask and tucking in to deep-fried Mujuru.

**Rudderless regime – Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> January:** It is becoming clear that there is no one in charge in Zimbabwe. No sooner does one minister make a policy statement than another contradicts it. After Finance Minister Chinamasa gave assurances that the indigenisation policy would be clarified to encourage foreign investment, the new Indigenisation Minister Christopher

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Mushowe said foreign investors would be lucky to get a 49% share in their business. It could be as little as 1%.

**Being counted – Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> January:** Zimbabweans came out in the cold in London in support of Itai Dzamara who has been campaigning in Africa Unity Square since last October demanding that Mugabe step down. We were joined outside the Embassy by UK members of his Occupy Africa Unity Square movement. In a message to the gathering, Itai Dzamara said that a new Zimbabwe was within reach and our protest would not be in vain.

**Call for UK parliamentary debate on Zimbabwe – Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> January:** The possibility of a parliamentary debate on Zimbabwe emerged at a meeting in a parliamentary committee room organised by the MP for Reading West, Alok Sharma, who was approached by Restoration of Human Rights in Zimbabwe (ROHR) Reading branch. The idea was supported by former Africa Minister Mark Simmonds who also attended the meeting. He spoke of 'small steps of progress' in Zimbabwe.

**Progress? – Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> January:** Ephraim Tapa, President of ROHR, disagreed with Mr Simmonds that there had been progress in Zimbabwe but welcomed the idea of a parliamentary debate. He told the Vigil: 'It is necessary to interrogate the British government's policy as it is not at all clear what it hopes to achieve'.

**Forward to the Stone Age – Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> January:** Mugabe is an appropriate choice as chairman of the African Union (AU). The South African head of the AU Commission set out the aims of the meeting at which Mugabe was chosen: 'Democracy, good governance and human rights'. Well they have found the man for the task. Prepare for a new African Renaissance: this one rebranded as the Stone Age. The

AU is not the only useless international organisation. You could add the EU with its re-engagement with Mugabe policy. But first prize must go the United Nations. It says unemployment in Zimbabwe is 5.42%.

**Campaign for parliamentary debate – Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> February:** The Zimbabwe Action Forum, meeting after the Vigil, discussed a template letter people could send to their MPs calling for a debate on Zimbabwe. Part of the letter said:

*In brief, all elections in Zimbabwe are rigged, there is no rule of law, corruption is rampant and the new constitution – largely paid for by the British taxpayer – is predictably ignored by the Mugabe Mafia. Yet Britain talks of 'progress' and is lifting sanctions!*

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*We want the debate to ask questions such as:  
What is the British Government's policy on Zimbabwe?*

**Zanu PF arrogance – Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> February:** Anyone really hoping for a turnaround in the Zimbabwean economy will be dismayed by the comment by Local Government Minister Ignatius Chombo. Speaking after a meeting with a 19-strong British investor delegation, he said there had been 'some little unpleasant disagreements'. Chombo was apparently outraged that the naïve investors wanted to know where Zimbabwe is going.

**The carpet's to blame – Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> February:** Zimbabweans in the UK gathered in force outside the Embassy to mark Mugabe's 91<sup>st</sup> birthday. The increasingly confused tyrant was supposed to be in South Africa attending to his duties as supreme leader of SADC (and Africa in general) but seems to have caught the wrong plane and turned up outside the Embassy, where he demonstrated how Mai Mujuru hid under the carpet and almost caused him to fall. Thanks to Fungayi who donned our Mugabe mask and demonstrated Mugabe's fall to the assembled media. The demonstration brought together a wide range of diaspora groups. Apart from our sister organisations, they included MDC-T, ZAPU, Occupy Africa Unity Square, Zimbabweans United for Democracy, Zimbabwe Social Democrats and the Swaziland Vigil.

**A nauseating feast – Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> February:** 'An event of truly spectacular moral ugliness' was how the Mayor of London Boris Johnson described Mugabe's 91<sup>st</sup> birthday party. Fungayi wore our Mugabe mask as we restaged thec Victoria Falls feast.

**No appeasement – Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> March:** Strong support for the Vigil's criticism of the European Union's new policy of 're-engaging' with the Mugabe regime has come from American former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Todd Moss. With President Obama renewing American sanctions for another year, Mr Moss says that it is perplexing that Europe is now choosing to break ranks and resuming aid, signalling a shift in approach from sticks to carrots. Europe, he says, is wilfully blind to what is happening and who is responsible for the worsening conditions in Zimbabwe. 'Any new support for the current government will likely only further entrench the current coterie around Mugabe.'

On a lovely sunny day we marked International Women's Day in support of Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) who were beaten by police during a Valentine's Day protest in

Bulawayo.

**We are Itai Dzamara – Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> March:** Exiled Zimbabweans demonstrated outside the Embassy about the abduction of the human rights activist Itai Dzamara whose brave Harare protest 'Occupy Africa Unity Square' (OAUS) has made him a beacon of freedom.

Among those at the Vigil was Tendai Kwari, leader of OAUS-UK, who said he feared for Itai's life.

Not troubled by Itai's fate, Mugabe set off with about 100 hangers-on for an obscure UN conference in Japan on 'Disaster Risk Reduction', riding roughshod over objections from the Japanese Embassy in Harare at his bloated delegation.

**Embassy demonstration – Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> March:** The Embassy went into meltdown when nine Zimbabwean expatriates charged in and demanded information about Itai Dzamara. With cries of 'We want Itai', 'Bring back Itai' and 'Zanu PF murderers', the group demanded to see the Ambassador. Frightened staff pointed to a door but a voice from inside that room shouted 'don't let them in'. In the meantime police – some of them armed – swarmed into the building summoned by a panic button. The protesters explained they were simply making a peaceful request for information from their Embassy. The police asked them to continue the protest outside. The Embassy then closed for the day.

**Embassy in panic – Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> March:** The protest against the feared murder of Dzamara continued at the Vigil with posters reading 'Where is Itai Dzamara?' and 'Release Itai Dzamara'. At meeting of the Zimbabwe Action Forum after the Vigil it was agreed to send a letter to the Ambassador asking for a meeting to discuss the abduction and warned *'The Zimbabwe Vigil fears that the unbridled criminal behaviour by the Mugabe regime is stoking a fire which could consume our people. Because the Embassy has no letterbox we will deliver this letter in person.'*

**Another Embassy Protest – Friday 27<sup>th</sup> March:** Ten people got into the Embassy and sang protest songs in the reception area, brandishing placards such as 'Bring back Itai Dzamara', 'Enough is enough' and 'Robert Mugabe and Zanu PF government must go'. Scared Embassy staff retreated and summoned the police who asked them to continue their protest outside. The demonstrators went on to the nearby South African High Commission, where they demanded that Mugabe should be replaced as chair of the AU and SADC.

**Embassy challenged again – Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> March:** Everybody at the Vigil signed a letter to

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the Zimbabwe Embassy about Dzamara to be delivered by hand. Vigil spokesman Fungayi Mabhunu said 'As far as the Vigil is concerned we will seize every opportunity to remind the world of what happens to brave and principled people in Zimbabwe who oppose Mugabe and Zanu PF. Every Zimbabwean representative coming here must face the question: Where is Itai Dzamara?'

**Diaspora No to Mugabe – Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> April:** If further evidence was needed that Mugabe is crazy it came with his appeal to the diaspora to give him more money – presumably for his non-stop travels in search of eternal life. Whatever Zanu PF in the UK says, no sane Zimbabwean here would dream of putting their money anywhere within Zanu PF's grasp. Although the party's UK spokesman happily proclaims that 'the economic renaissance (is) already in motion'.

**Deadly silence – Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> April:** While Mugabe continues to flaunt himself abroad, there has been a deafening silence from the Zanu PF regime about the abduction of Dzamara despite a court order to search for him. Even ousted Vice-President Mujuru claimed to be outraged by Zanu PF's indifference to Dzamara's fate. Amnesty International says no credible investigation seems to be taking place.

### [Vigil Protests – Friday 17th April:](#)

Exiled Zimbabweans demonstrated outside the Embassy and the South African High Commission in London in protest at the abduction in Harare of Dzamara and at the new upsurge of xenophobic violence in South Africa. The protests came as ambassadors of SADC countries were holding a meeting at Zimbabwe House. Barriers were placed outside the Embassy and police kept guard after several incidents in which demonstrators entered the building in attempts to deliver a letter. Once again the Embassy refused to accept the Vigil's letter asking to discuss the abduction of Dzamara and the demonstrators were told they could not even push it under the closed front door. So we posted it at the local post office. Activists took time out from the demonstration to gather outside the nearby South African High Commission and presented a letter for President Zuma protesting at the upsurge of xenophobic violence in South Africa.

**Let them drown? – Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> April:** News that some 700 migrants from Africa drowned when their boat capsized off Libya came within hours of a meeting at which the Zimbabwe Action Forum discussed the failure of the European Union and the African Union to deal with

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the growing crisis posed by the headlong flight from Africa and the Middle East. Among the ideas the forum discussed was the need for a UN protection zone outside the EU where migrants could receive food and medical attention, and indeed schooling, while their asylum claims for Europe could be processed. On the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence, the Vigil was joined outside by Mugabe himself (Fungayi in our Mugabe mask). He was surrounded by devils bearing the gifts he has given the Zimbabwean people in his long reign: unemployment, starvation and terror.

**Mugabe's illegal sanctions – Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> April:** The ignominious failure of the Mugabe regime's court challenge to the sanctions imposed by the European Union has escaped much attention. That the challenge was a ludicrous waste of public money was obvious to the Vigil from the start – thrown into comic relief anyway by the gradual removal of the targeted measures. Zimbabwe must now foot the entire bill for this legal circus. Before the Vigil there was another demonstration outside the South African High Commission against the latest xenophobic violence.

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

**FOR THE RECORD:** 7 signed the register.

**EVENTS AND NOTICES:**

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- **Swaziland Vigil.** Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> January from 10 am to 1 pm outside the Swaziland High Commission, 20 Buckingham Gate, London SW1E 6LB.
  
- **ROHR Executive Meeting:** Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> January at 12 noon. Venue: Strand Continental Hotel (first floor lounge), 143 Strand, London WC2R 1JA. For directions see below.
  
- **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.
  
- **Monthly Itai Dzamara protest.** Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> January from 2 – 6 pm outside the Zimbabwe Embassy in London. The protest is to mark ten months since Dzamara's abduction by intelligence agents.
  
- **Zimbabwe Action Forum (ZAF).** Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> January from 6.15 pm. Venue: Strand Continental Hotel (first floor lounge), 143 Strand, London WC2R 1JA. From the Vigil it's about a ten 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 an optician. 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.
  
- **Zimbabwe Yes We Can Movement** holds monthly meetings in London as the political face of ROHR and the Vigil.



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- **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: <https://www.facebook.com/zimbabwevigil>

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

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