



REPORT ON PUBLIC SEMINAR “ZIMBABWE AT THE CROSSROADS”

DATE – 4TH MAY, 2007

HOSTED BY: ISS (SAHSP AND ASAP) AND THE IGD:

Approximately 40 people coming from the donor community, research institutions and government attended this seminar.

Dr Cheryl Hendricks gave the introductory remarks, underscoring the aims of the seminar, which included discussing the possible choices for and future of Zimbabwe and the ingredients of that future. She then introduced the main speaker Professor Brian Raftopoulos, of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, and the discussants, Dr Siphamandla Zondi of the Institute for Global Dialogue and Chris Maroleng of the Institute for Security Studies.

Prof. Raftopolous observed that the main challenges confronting Zimbabwe include the rapid contraction of the formal sector, inflation, and budget deficits. The Zimbabwe government, he observed, had directed its affront on individual livelihoods with formal state attacks such as Murambatsvina. This left millions of Zimbabweans further impoverished whilst the country degenerated into a rent-seeking economy with those with access to foreign currency amassing massive profits. The broader society, through the civic movement, has mobilised against the large scale human rights abuse and deteriorating economic circumstances, but state repression has severely weakened the movement.

He drew comparisons between the civic movement of the 1980s to that of today, observing that in the 1980s, the civic movement had a national outlook and staged meaningful strikes that beared purpose. From 2005

however the civic movement has been severely weakened through state repression and internal disorganisation. The consequence has been that the civic movement has found it increasingly difficult to progressively pursue a unified national agenda. The opposition parties have had their own leadership divisions and have too suffered from allegations over financial impropriety.

Zimbabwe as a result has been facing a stalemate since 2005 with a declining economy, international isolation and a weakened opposition. The ruling party (ZANU-PF), too, is facing its own internal wrangles over succession. Raftopoulos stated that previously ZANU-PF dealt with internal divisions or discontent through violent means. Though it has again adopted this approach, it lacks an effective strategy to bring Zimbabwe out of its current crisis.

Zimbabwe, he observed, is at crossroads; internally, regionally and even internationally. There is increasing concern in SADC on the inability to resolve the crisis, as well as increased international pressure on Zimbabwe. There appears to be a growing consensus between SADC and the West on Zimbabwe. The new emphasis on mediation, he argues, represents a clear window of opportunity to move the situation forward and that President Mbeki is the right person to move the process forward regardless of his previous preference for quiet diplomacy. The key questions however are related to the format and timetable of the mediation process.

He offered three possible scenarios for the future of Zimbabwe:

- 1) Zimbabwe may continue along the same path with Mugabe's 'go-hang' approach. Repression and economic decline will continue. This path, however, is not constructive and will only worsen the situation.

- 2) Regime Change – Removing Mugabe from power: This scenario would mean that the opposition groups have to organise themselves a lot better than they are at the moment in order to put pressure on the government. He discounted the military option or a sabotage alternative arguing that

the core of the security forces still support Mugabe and that the MDC have no military capacity.

3) The third scenario is that which involves the mediation process. This process should culminate in at least minimal conditions for free and fair elections. The opposition, he stated, will have to among others, demand for a new constitution and new legislation that allows Zimbabweans in the diaspora to vote and which allows the media to operate freely. The mediation process will also need to define the role of the military. This mediation process he argued should include civil society.

Raftopoulos argued that the government is likely to give little ground for constitutional reforms and will most likely increase attacks to break down the opposition movement as he feels that the internal structures in Zimbabwe remain in his favour. The only threats he fears are from SADC and the international community. He also argued that there is a possibility of the mediation process becoming convoluted, leading to messy elections and that a messy transition may not be in the best of interest of Zimbabwe. He however maintained that there appears to be no other way of getting out of the current stalemate and that the mediation process presents an opportunity that should be pursued, if it fails, the authoritarian state will continue.

Raftopoulos concluded by saying that the state in Zimbabwe seems intent on continuing in its ways of repressive rule and that Mugabe's strategy of skilfully advancing arguments for sovereignty and legitimacy of his government will continue. The Southern African Development Cooperation (SADC) seems to have no strategy of their own to deal with these arguments or the democracy deficit in Zimbabwe.

The first discussant, Dr. Siphamandla Zondi, observed that the opposition parties have often missed opportunities to galvanise pressure on Mugabe and his government. He argued that the attitude of Western powers of not consulting Southern African regional powers, in addition to their imposition of sanctions on Zimbabwe, places regional powers in a catch 22

situation because they find it difficult to pursue the line of impartial arbiters while at the same time siding with the megaphone diplomacy of Western powers. For Zondi, Mugabe has capitalised on the West's approach of supporting the opposition to advance his anti imperial rhetoric. He argued that the call for regime change was narrow in focus as it limits itself to state power. He also maintained that the call by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) for free and fair elections was a narrow agenda since it does not aim at fundamental changes in society.

Zondi added that MDC's alliance with Western powers and its approach of soliciting for political support, mainly from the urban base, constitute some of its major weaknesses since these render it ineffective in marketing itself as a vanguard party of the majority. Furthermore, the MDC has been creating narrow alliances with the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and Western powers while failing to skilfully build solidarity with regional governments. On the question of SADC and its perceived 'quiet diplomacy' Zondi noted that member countries have held diverse positions with some governments showing concern over the land issue as far back as 2002. He supported the mediation process saying it is a positive move given that it is regionally mandated by the SADC TROIKA and that it should be anchored on Zimbabweans finding their own solution.

The next discussant, Chris Maroleng observed that Zimbabwe's economy stands in Mugabe's way as the biggest hindrance beyond what was offered by opposition groups. He added that what is happening in the ruling party ZANU-PF (internal divisions) is a consolidation of forces that see Mugabe as a liability. He questioned how ZANU PF could dialogue nationally when it is unable to resolve its own internal succession problems. Chris augmented the idea that regime change in Zimbabwe is unlikely given the posture of the security apparatus and that there will need to be significant military reforms for that to happen. He observed that the tentacles of the 'heir apparents' in the ruling ZANU-PF extend well into the military. He questioned whether Mbeki could have the time to

deal with Mugabe given the succession politics in his own backyard. This scenario, he said, will affect the sustainability of the mediation process.

Chris further asserted that the opposition is looking for short term solutions by focussing on laws that ensure free and fair elections observing that there is a possibility that the election could turn out in favour of the incumbent and that what is needed is structural change. Chris concluded that MDC has failed to come up with a nationalist discourse in response to Mugabe's anti imperialistic discourse.

In response to Siphamandla Zondi and Chris Maroleng, Brian Raftopoulos argued against underestimating the ability of the state to limit the opposition from seeking support in the rural areas. He observed that the 'land occupation' was a government strategy that has significantly contributed toward that goal. He also argued against the consideration that the opposition and civic organisations should focus on structural changes in the mediation process, maintaining that questions of rights and accountability are important and should, too, be treated as first order concerns. For Raftopoulos the lack of broader alternatives on Zimbabwe is not only a problem of the opposition parties but of the region as a whole given that both have failed to present alternatives. He supported the argument that military reform in Zimbabwe is important and added that it would not be strange to have ZANU-PF to undergo some form of internal changes. His apprehension is that whatever the changes, ZANU-PF will remain repressive because it would not want to weaken itself.

Plenary Session

During the plenary session the land question was raised as a significant contributor to the current political situation in Zimbabwe and it was argued that the opposition lacks the strategy to appropriately respond to the land issue.

On mediation, it was observed that it was Mugabe's elite who have taken over large sections of the land and questions were raised how the mediation process will deal with this issue. Analyses, which go beyond

'easy scenarios' was urged and a number of questions posed. First, given that ZANU-PF has traditionally solved its internal problems through violent means, what would it mean for Zimbabwe if conflict within ZANU-PF exacerbated? Second, on the mediation process, what would constitute success or failure and what would be the benchmarks for that success or failure?

Markers of success were deemed to be a new constitution and free and fair elections, opening up the media and also stopping of political violence. Markers of failure for the mediation process would thus entail the non-realisation of the above issues.

Concern was expressed about the possibility of parties using the mediation processes as a strategy to prolong conflict. The question was raised whether it would not have been more plausible for SADC to form a mediation committee or hand the initiative to the United Nations in order to internationalise the process beyond South Africa. The scenario where the Zimbabwean government accepts the conditions of the opposition for free and fair elections, and it (the Government) still wins was also suggested. What would be the implication for Zimbabwe in this scenario? What are the incentives and disincentives for Mugabe and his elite to step down.

The threat of 'handing over' the mediation process to the United Nations, as a leverage to push the mediation process forward was considered as a possibility.

Cheryl Hendricks made concluding remarks, pointing out the need for clear terms of reference, and time frames in the mediation process. She noted that the possibility of realignments in Zimbabwean politics must not be discounted. She closed the seminar by thanking participants for their time and contributions.