



## **Can SADC redeem its failure to solve the Zimbabwe Crisis?**

As we recover within Zimbabwe from the startling experience of the army on the streets without the President's permission, the so-called "non-coup" coup, and face the prospect of a prolonged stalemate between state and military, SADC will once again debate what to do.

The question that arises is whether it will cross the minds of any of the worthy leaders that will assemble for this high level summit, whenever it is convened, that they are as much a part of the problem as they might be of the solution. A brief history of SADC's engagement with Zimbabwe since 2000 illustrates this.

In 2000, a bloody election was held that SADC, dissenting from the view of the SADC Parliamentary Forum, the Commonwealth and the EU, held was a "legitimate expression of the people's will". This was an election unlike any other seen on the SADC region previously, and was not unique for Zimbabwe as elections in 2002, 2005 and 2008 demonstrated. It is also the case that Zimbabwe, within SADC generally, is the most politically violent and especially around elections.<sup>1</sup>

Violence apart, it can hardly be the case that Zimbabwe has been a stable member of the SADC community. It has become an international pariah, subjected to both restrictive conditions and sanctions, and seen the massive withdrawal of foreign investment. It has seen a very large number of its citizens migrate, legally and illegally, and SADC states have been those mostly afflicted. It has now nearly destroyed a once-vibrant economy, gone through one of the most dramatic periods of hyperinflation seen anywhere, and may even be heading back there.

None of this suggests a good neighbour, and, in SADC terms, does not suggest a country striving to adhere to and implement the Principles of the SADC as amended in 2001. Does Zimbabwe strive for the following?

- solidarity, peace and security;
- human rights, democracy and the rule of law;
- equity, balance and mutual benefit; and
- peaceful settlement of disputes.

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<sup>1</sup> RAU (2016), *Are former liberation movements inherently violent as governments?* February 2016. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit.

It is common cause within Zimbabwe that ZANU-PF has failed on all the first three, and now, with the “non-coup” coup, has failed on the last.

From the Constitutional Referendum in 2000, it has been evident to all that the deep problem in Zimbabwe has been the adamant refusal by ZANU-PF to contemplate ceding political power at all. Every election result from 2000 has been disputed, with considerable evidence that the elections were flawed. Yet SADC, with the most minor of reservations, and with polite recommendations, has accepted all the results of virtually all of these elections.

The exception to this timid dealing with a deviant member of the community was in 2008. Whatever the legal and constitutional niceties around the result of the first poll, and the margins of victory, Morgan Tsvangirai and the MDC-T won that election. Instead of applying pressure on Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF to hand over the reins of power, SADC allowed the re-run of the Presidential poll, and then, shocked by the violence that accompanied this, would not accept the result. It can even be argued that SADC’s failure to insist on the result of the first poll standing was a contributor to the massive violence that then followed.<sup>2</sup>

The logical step in rejecting the result should have been to return to the first poll and insist on Tsvangirai and MDC-T assuming power. The peace treaty that was the Global Political Agreement led inevitably to the result in the 2013 elections, a result that defied all political sense, and even SADC had to concede that there were many defects. Incidentally, apart from the preliminary report of the SADC Observer Mission, there has never been a release of the final report.

Behind all of this, and evident since 2004, has been the brewing problem of succession within ZANU-PF, a problem that SADC must have been aware of, particularly because of the advanced age of the president. Additionally, the steady growth of the securocrat state was evident to all. When the purges began, beginning with the probable murder of Solomon Mujuru, the ousting of Joice Mujuru, and finally the long, slow purge of Emmerson Mnangagwa, few in the SADC corridors of power could avoid wondering where this would end.

Now, it is evident that the failure to broker comprehensive talks between the political parties, the engagement of the support from the churches and civil society, and the provision of the inclusive scaffolding of the international community now leaves Zimbabwe on the edge of a precipice.

Zimbabwe and the region have been here before, but only in 1979 was a comprehensive international engagement able to pull the country back from collapse, and usher in a political settlement that was sufficient to create a new state. South Africa has been in such a situation before, as have other countries in the SADC region. The key in every case has been a national dialogue, and, in South Africa’s case, the detailed discussions under CODESA that led to one of the more successful transitions and long-standing stability.

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<sup>2</sup> Kwinjeh. G (2008), *Staring a gift horse in the mouth. Death Spiral in Zimbabwe: Mediation, Violence and the GNU*. 18 June 2008.

On Saturday, the Zimbabwean citizenry demonstrated their joy at the prospect of change and reform, and with many different voices and opinions. Central to the joy was the demand for Robert Mugabe to resign, but there is no clarity about what can follow this resignation, and the process and the outcome will be crucial to deciding both stability and development.

This is what Zimbabwe needs now: not the papering over the cracks by avoiding the uncomfortable conclusions about invalid elections, or the timid peace treaty of the Global Political Agreement. It needs a carefully designed and mediated negotiation process leading to a broadly accepted transitional arrangement (maybe a National Transitional Authority), a range of fundamental reforms (both political and economic), and then an election that leads to no dispute over the result. It also needs not to be another elite pact, but a process in which the views of the ordinary citizens are taken into account. This is especially the case if the transitional arrangement will postpone elections.

This is the task that faces SADC today, and we hope that this time they are up to it.