
3rd Zimbabwean Solidarity Conference - Statement

24th-25th February, South Africa

The Zimbabwe Solidarity and Consultation forum is a network of progressive South African civil society organizations, including youth, women, labour, faith-based, human rights and student formations. Over the past months our network has grown rapidly in size and influence, and we say confidently that we have contributed to a much greater understanding of the crisis and challenges in Zimbabwe within our organizations and within the broader South African debate. We convened our 3rd Zimbabwe Solidarity Conference on the 24-25th February in Tshwane to assess progress in our work and to discuss a programme of action going forward.

All dimensions of the crisis in Zimbabwe require urgent attention. However, it is the persisting political blockage that makes it difficult to address the social, economic and moral crises in any sustainable way. Our solidarity efforts need to be directed at the political crisis in Zimbabwe as a priority but not to the exclusion of the other dimensions of the crisis.

We commend efforts made by the South African government and by SADC to foster talks between the major political forces in Zimbabwe to arrive at a negotiated road-map for a democratic transition. These endeavors have not succeeded for the moment. There has been a lack of seriousness from the side of the ZANU-PF government. The unilateral declaration of a March 31 election date by the Zimbabwean government is in complete breach of the spirit and intent of that process.

As we move towards March 31, we need to bear in mind that the Zimbabwean elections of 2000 and 2002 deepened the political crisis, rather than contributing to a progressive resolution. Since 2002 democratic space has been further eroded. What Zimbabwe needs now is not another gravely flawed election but a SADC-facilitated negotiated transition towards democracy.

Comparing 2005 with the elections of 2000 and 2002 there is one crucially important difference now. We have in place the SADC Principles and Guidelines. All SADC governments have solemnly signed these Principles, which commit them (in terms of clause 7.1) to a scrupulous implementation. As South African and Southern African citizens we are proud of these very important and thoroughly progressive Principles and Guidelines. The fundamental requirements of a legitimate election are no longer a matter of vagueness, they are clearly benchmarked.

It is already clear that the forthcoming March 31 elections will not be remotely compliant with these Principles and Guidelines. We believe that the majority of SADC governments should appreciate very clearly that any pragmatic compromise on the SADC Principles and Guidelines, in the vain hope that this compromise will establish some kind of stability in Zimbabwe will, in fact: Perpetuate the Zimbabwean political crisis; Undermine the standing of our regional governments in the eyes of their citizens and the international community at large. They will also appreciate that this is a litmus test for other elections in our region.

We support President Mbeki's views that SADC must have a much more hands on role in the run up to the March 31 elections. We believe that this must apply with even greater vigor after the end of March. SADC must actively fulfill its responsibilities in Zimbabwe to open up democratic space that remains open beyond the election itself. We are disappointed that SADC, for whatever reason, has in the past weeks been slow to take up its role in Zimbabwe.

In the coming days and weeks, we, the participating formations within the Zimbabwe Solidarity and Consultation Forum will be intensifying our activities within South Africa and throughout our region, in support of our vision and in solidarity with the people of Zimbabwe. We call on all South and Southern Africans to join us in these activities. Our solidarity efforts will need to extend way beyond the election itself.

At this week's conference we have agreed upon a wide range of practical activities aimed at raising awareness and conscientising people about the crisis in Zimbabwe which include: Mass actions aimed at popularizing our vision and mobilizing and organizing people behind our solidarity efforts. These actions include support for the COSATU programme and a range of other localized and national efforts on campuses, within places of worship and in communities. Our solidarity front also welcomes COSATU's efforts with allied formations in SATUCC. Many of our

participating formations will also be working closely with their regional counterparts.? We will also be supporting a range of efforts to ensure that South African civil society formations are represented in election monitoring initiatives.? Engaging the media to ensure adequate and impartial coverage of the situation in Zimbabwe and using our networks to increase access to information.? A consolidation of the growing level of participation of mass based youth and student structures in our solidarity efforts and recognition of the importance of this involvement.

During the coming days further details of the specific activities will be released as action plans are further developed.