

A massive Vigil – perhaps the biggest one we have ever had, apart from special occasions. At the close, when we joined hands to sing Nkosi Sikelele Africa, people were standing three deep right around the Embassy piazza.

Perhaps it was developments at home that prompted the big turnout.

Or it might have been insecurity following the detention and threatened deportation of Luka Phiri of the Vigil Management Team.

Certainly there was much discussion of the news that Tsvangirai had returned home for party consultations ahead of a SA-facilitated meeting with Mugabe and the reconvening of Parliament. We are outside the Embassy every Saturday whatever the season and, battling the cold in the fading light, we despaired as all the chefs in Southern Africa took a month off for Christmas to stuff themselves while people died of cholera or starved or were beaten to death. Anyway we trust our chefs are sufficiently refreshed to put in a couple of days work before the country closes down for the celebrations marking Comrade Mugabe's 85th birthday.

At the Vigil we have not had the luxury of a summer break. In fact we have had a busy week, what with the right to work campaign and our efforts to save Luka from deportation. Many people who came past the Vigil, seeing a picture of Luka on the table, expressed their outrage at the attempt to send him back to the deathly welcome of Malawi. We were in close contact with Luka through the afternoon via text messages.

In response to Luka's first message to the Vigil saying how much he was missing us, we did a big 'pom pom' for him, shouting 'Free Luka, Free Luka', and sent him the message that we were all thinking about him and supporting him.

Zimbabwe Vigil 17th January 2009

Written by Administrator

Sunday, 18 January 2009 17:42 - Last Updated Sunday, 18 January 2009 19:20

Luka's final message was: 'This is the best time of my life to know there are people who really care. I am happy and blessed to be part of the Vigil. Nothing bad will happen to me as long as the Vigil is around.'

Many will already know that, through the great efforts of the Zimbabwean community in the UK, Luka's deportation was halted at the last minute. He is still in detention though and we are working to get him released. Many thanks to Yeukai Taruvinga for her untiring efforts to help Luka and to Fungayi Mabhunu of the Vigil Management Team who visited Luka daily while he was held in Colnbrook Immigration Removal Centre. He has now been moved to Dover. We will keep you posted on what happens to Luka via 'Update on Luka' at the top of the home page of our website.

Vigil Management Team member Sue reported on the demonstration on Tuesday organised by Citizens for Sanctuary in support of the campaign to allow Zimbabwean asylum seekers to work. She said that after making representations at 10 Downing Street, the Zimbabwean group of some 300 or so toyi toyied to the nearby Home Office where they shouted 'Free Luka'.

It was good to hear from Cathy Buckle this week. Her new book 'Innocent Victims' about Meryl Harrison's courageous rescue of thousands of farm animals from Zimbabwean farms whose owners had been forced to flee will be available in March – www.merlinunwin.co.uk. Cathy's message to the Vigil: 'Thank you for everything you continue to do for Zimbabwe – so many years'.

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Some more points: We were glad to have with us Sarah who had just come back from Bulawayo and gave us an update on the situation there. An opera singer stopped to sign our petitions on her way to perform at Covent Garden. Eunita Masola handed £40 to the Vigil. She said it had been given to her by colleagues for causes in Zimbabwe when she went to work in her Vigil t-shirt.

In last week's diary we gave a brief account of the activities of our partner organisation Restoration of Human Rights in Zimbabwe (ROHR) in the first half of last year. Herewith a report on the second half of ROHR's year.

14th July – ROHR is launching an ongoing arts festival in an effort to counter political violence and explore democratic space. It is working with Zimbabwe Poets for Human Rights and their first event will be held in Kadoma on Saturday 19th July.

31st July - At a Vigil Management Team meeting the possibility of setting up a fund to support victims of the election violence in Zimbabwe was discussed. It was pointed out that our partner ROHR had already contributed substantial money to support victims of violence, most notably helping to pay for Tonderai Ndira's funeral and providing Tichanzii Gandanga with the means to leave Zimbabwe to get treatment in South Africa.

It was agreed that it would be duplication to set up a separate fund and that we should channel any money through ROHR.

25th September – ROHR has today taken the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe to court over the central bank's failure to review bank withdrawal limits in line with the economic situation.

10th October – More than 200 ROHR activists took to the streets of Harare today at 10.00 hours in a protest march. The demonstration was staged under the Demand for Democracy and Justice Campaign whose primary aim is to see Zimbabwe hold fresh elections for a new government and a leader of the people's choice within two years. The police reacted by raiding ROHR offices and briefly detained ROHR programmes officer Mrs Mapanzure.

17th October – ROHR's protest in Mutare attracted more than 150 people. The demonstration was however broken up by Zanu-PF youths. Clifford Hlatshwayo, our co-ordinator responsible for the Demand for Democracy and Justice Campaign, was severely injured.

27th October - 23 men and women have been hospitalised and seven arrested after ROHR demonstrated in Harare today. Four people are missing after having been abducted by Zanu PF. More than 200 ROHR activists participated in the demonstration that brought business to a

standstill. The protesters marched towards the Harare International Conference Centre, the venue for this week's SADC meeting.

28th October - More than 100 people participated in a demonstration organised by ROHR in Masvingo. The protest is a continuation of the protests during the meeting of SADC heads of state.

1st November – ROHR activist Osborne Kachuru was beaten to death at ZANU PF's offices in Fourth Street, Harare, after a peaceful demonstration during the SADC talks on Monday.

Moses

Mutasa and Memory Chashayeke who were abducted on 27th October

have been found. They are shaken and in deep pain caused by the extremely brutal assault they endured at the hands of their Zanu-PF abductors.

4th November – ROHR mobilised more than 200 people to participate in the protest march held in Gweru today. They were holding placards and distributing flyers to the public.

21st November – The 'Demand for Justice and Democracy' demonstration in Bulawayo was subdued because of the heavy presence of police, army and CIOs but ROHR members managed to distribute flyers to people in the streets who approvingly shouted, 'victory is for the people'.

1st December – More than 350 Bindura ROHR members and residents took to the streets today in a protest organised as part of the ROHR campaign for democracy and justice.

21st December – About 40 ROHR members in Bindura have fled their homes to mountains and surrounding areas following attacks and arrests by Zanu PF. Several ROHR members were beaten up and are being accused of having staged a demonstration against President Mugabe without police authority.

For latest Vigil pictures check: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/zimbabwewigil/>

FOR THE RECORD: over 250 signed the register.

FOR YOUR DIARY:

ROHR Newcastle General Meeting. Saturday 24th January at 61 Bishops Benwell, Newcastle NE15 6RY from 1400 - 1730 hrs. Contact: Linda Chingwinyiso 07894142263, Joseph Madziva 07905850073 or Fadzai Mudekwa 07727221873.

Unite Zimnite. Saturday 24th January at 7 pm. King's College London's student-led charity Project Zimbabwe is holding a fundraiser for Zimbabwe. The event is an African themed open mic night with over 8 acts coming to perform.

Money raised will go towards their MedYouth Project, a life skills programme being taught to school children in Bulawayo next summer. Venue: Function Room, Walkabout, Temple. Cost: £10/£5NUS. For more information, check:

<http://www.kclprojectzimbabwe.blogspot.com/>

'The Agony of Zimbabwe, What Chance for Change?' Monday 9th February, 6.45 – 8.45 pm. Talk by Christina Lamb Foreign

Affairs Correspondent for the Sunday Times. Hosted by Friends of Le Monde diplomatique. Venue: the Gallery, 70/77 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ (near Farringdon Tube station).

For more information check:

<http://monde-diplo-friends.org.uk/calendar.htm>

Zimbabwe Association's Women's Weekly Drop-in Centre. Fridays 10.30 am – 4 pm.

Venue: The Fire Station Community and ICT Centre, 84 Mayton Street, London N7 6QT, Tel: 020 7607 9764. Nearest underground: Finsbury Park. For more information contact the Zimbabwe Association 020 7549 0355 (open Tuesdays and Thursdays).