



There was considerable media interest in our Independence Day protest about the conditions in Zimbabwean prisons. TV and press photographers vied for the best shots. Public attention was grabbed by graphic pictures of starving prisoners and bodies piled high in Mugabe's hell-holes. Many passers-by stopped to add their names to a special petition to SADC: "**A petition to Zimbabwe's neighbours**

: We call upon the Southern African Development Community – as guarantors of the Zimbabwe power-sharing agreement – to put pressure on the new Zimbabwean government of national unity to stop the blatant abuse of human rights of prisoners in Zimbabwe who are dying of starvation, disease and torture." Our protest was given added urgency by a report that cholera has begun to spread in prison.

Patson Muzuwa of the Vigil management team explained the Vigil's demand that the prison population be reduced to a level where those incarcerated could be properly fed and housed. Otherwise we were looking at a genocide. Patson, who has been imprisoned several times for his activism, described the abuses of a gulag system in which innocent people could be completely lost to the outside world. Batson Chapata also talked of his horrific experiences in Zimbabwean prisons – going naked because clothes were not provided, having to eat food not fit for human consumption to stay alive and not being allowed to respond to calls of nature with the resultant filth in the cells. Batson was imprisoned for political activities in 1998 and prison conditions have deteriorated even further since then.

Ephraim Tapa, another member of the management team and Founder and President of Restoration of Human Rights in Zimbabwe (ROHR), put our protest in the context of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He pointed to the Jewish Holocaust and said that in a way it could be compared to what was happening in Zimbabwe. Our poster "Holocaust conditions in Zimbabwe's prisons" will continue to feature in future Vigils until something is done about this crime against humanity. Ephraim went on to say "they can't feed them, clothe them . . . they are treated worse than pigs or dogs. Whoever – Mugabe or Tsvangirai – is in power we must have our human rights." The Vigil was calling for an amnesty because prisoners were in most cases suffering far more than their crimes deserved.

On another matter, our petition about aid to Zimbabwe has been amended to take in some suggestions and now reads "**A petition to the UK government:** We welcome the UK's humanitarian assistance to Zimbabwe but call on the UK government to withhold development aid until it is confident that the money will benefit the people rather than the corrupt Mugabe regime."

The Vigil management

## Zimbabwe Vigil Diary – 18th April 2009

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Sunday, 19 April 2009 16:57 - Last Updated Wednesday, 22 April 2009 13:29

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team met after the Vigil and agreed to hold a monthly forum on the last Saturday of every month starting on 31st May (subject to venue availability). The team wants the opportunity to get to know supporters better and find out what skills and resources people have to offer. Another decision was to form a stewardship group to make new supporters welcome.

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

**FOR THE RECORD:** 362 signed the register.

FOR YOUR DIARY:

- **Central London Zimbabwe Forum.** Monday 20th April at 7.30 pm. Political analyst, blogger and writer Musekiwa Makwanya will speak about the future of the GNU. Venue: Bell and Compass, 9-11 Villiers Street, London, WC2N 6NA, next to Charing Cross Station at the corner of Villiers Street and John Adam Street.
- **Fundraising for the Vigil at the London Marathon.** Sunday 26th April. Steve Garvey, teacher at the Dolphin School, Battersea, is running in the London Marathon to raise money on behalf of the Vigil.
- **ROHR Leeds general meeting.** Saturday, 2nd May from 1.30 – 5 pm. Venue: Dock Green Inn, Leeds LS9 7AB. Contact: Wonder M Mubaiwa 07958758568, Donna Mugoni 07533259373

or B Sikosana  
07940181761

- **'Strangers into Citizens' Rally.** Bank Holiday Monday 4th May at 12 noon in Trafalgar Square  
Meet in Tothill Street SW1 at 11.30 for walk to Trafalgar Square  
. The event is preceded by services in several churches including Westminster Cathedral, St Margaret's, Parliament Square and Central Hall, Westminster  
. For more information:  
[www.strangersintocitizens.org.uk](http://www.strangersintocitizens.org.uk)

- **First Zimbabwe Vigil Forum.** Proposed date: Saturday, 31st May. Date to be confirmed once venue secured.

- **Service of solidarity with the torture survivors of Zimbabwe.** Friday 26th June from 7 – 8 pm. Venue: Southwark Cathedral. This is the 8th year the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum has marked UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture.

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· **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).