

The Vigil seldom agrees with The Herald but we do have some sympathy with the paper's scepticism about the naïve remarks made by Britain's new Ambassador to Zimbabwe, Catriona Laing.

'Obviously he's an iconic figure', she told The Herald. 'He is one of the few presidents in an African country whose name will be known in our country and in most countries – maybe because he has been in power for a long time'.

'Everyone has heard about him. I've read about him. So it was interesting to meet him in person', she said. 'He gave me a signal that where we have differences we can have a mature dialogue' (see: Mugabe an iconic figure, says British envoy – <http://m.news24.com/news24/Africa/Zimbabwe/Mugabe-an-iconic-figure-says-British-envoy-20141023> which includes a video of Ms Laing).

The Vigil is surprised by the use of the word iconic for a ruthless dictator with blood dripping from his hands. When people talk of an icon they think of some hero like Mandela, though we accept she may have been thinking of 'icons' like Hitler, Mao and Idi Amin. Anyway, The Herald itself was not happy with her comments.

The paper carried a long article commenting on the interview, headlined 'Ms Laing, we

Written by Administrator

Sunday, 26 October 2014 15:17 -

presume?’ Apart from routine insults offered to any British envoy, The Herald said Ms Laing’s remarks could be interpreted as ‘arrogant or patronising’. It argued that Britain and the West really had to go down on their knees and show real repentance for the terrible things they had done to Zanu PF. Otherwise Ms Laing ‘will leave Zimbabwe a very frustrated woman if she believes that at the core of the dispute between Zimbabwe and Britain are human rights, democracy and governance issues’. That’s putting the UK in its place (see: <http://www.herald.co.zw/ms-laing-we-presume/>).

What the Vigil finds so surprising is that successive British Ambassadors have had their teeth kicked in by Zanu PF and still come out smiling. The cheerful Ms Laing’s immediate predecessor the equally cheerful Deborah Bronnert described Mugabe as ‘charming’. But where did that get us?

The Vigil can’t understand why the British government doesn’t get the message that grovelling to Zanu PF and stuffing aid down their throats will not work. They are just propping up a rapacious regime. Eddie Cross, MP for the MDC T, in his latest article, criticises Western aid policies. He says they solve nothing; the real problem in countries like Zimbabwe is poor governance (see: <http://www.zimvigil.co.uk/vigil-news/campaign-news/624-creating-a-more-equitable-world> on our campaigns page).

He says: ‘Dictatorial regimes do not want education for their people; they do not want settled secure communities living in their own homes. They want their people dependent on charity – their charity and permission. They want patronage and reward to be the keys to safety and security, not freedom and enterprise. Until we are able to meet these primary needs and to satisfy these fundamental rights, the problems created in our world by inequality and poverty will never be addressed.’

The Vigil is not surprised that, despite reports of a bumper harvest last year, Zimbabwe is classed in the 2014 Global Hunger Index as having 'serious hunger levels' (see: <http://www.theindependent.co.zw/2014/10/20/serious-hunger-stalks-zim-despite-bumper-harvest/>)

-

Serious hunger' stalks Zim despite bumper harvest)

. As Cross notes in his article, life expectancy in Zimbabwe has declined since 1990 from 63 to 54 years – levels last seen 100 years ago.

The Vigil would like to know what Britain's Ambassador to Zimbabwe thinks of this and whether aid money couldn't be better spent in supporting activists working for exactly the issues that The Herald dismisses: 'human rights, democracy and governance issues'.

Other points

-

At the Vigil we sold our last edition of The Zimbabwean newspaper, which has now ceased publication in print form in the UK. Our weekly diary will continue to be featured on their website. Our supporters will miss having the paper to read. It has been getting better and better.

-

Thanks to Tendai Chadehumbe, Deborah Harry, Veli Mamba, Charles Dhumasani Ndlovu, Fungayi Mabhunu and Hazvenei Mabika for arriving early to help set up. Thanks also to Tendai for taking care of the front table throughout the Vigil and to Deborah for helping her.

Normalising the abnormal – Zimbabwe Vigil Diary: 25th October 2014

Written by Administrator

Sunday, 26 October 2014 15:17 -

For latest Vigil pictures check: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/zimbabwевigil/> . Please note: Vigil photos can only be downloaded from our Flickr website.

FOR THE RECORD: 32 signed the register.

EVENTS AND NOTICES:

-

Zimbabwe Action Forum (ZAF). Saturday 1st November from 6.15 pm. Venue: Strand Continental Hotel (first floor lounge), 143 Strand, London WC2R 1JA. From the Vigil it's about a 10 minute walk, in the direction away from Trafalgar Square. The Strand Continental is situated on the south side of the Strand between Somerset House and the turn off onto Waterloo Bridge. The entrance is marked by a sign at street level. It's between a newsagent and Pizza Express. Nearest underground: Temple (District and Circle lines) and Holborn.

-

ROHR Executive Committee meeting. Saturday 1st November from 12 noon. Venue: Strand Continental Hotel (first floor lounge), 143 Strand, London WC2R 1JA.

-

Next Swaziland Vigil. Saturday 1st November from 10 am to 1 pm outside the Swaziland High Commission, 20 Buckingham Gate, London SW1E 6LB.

-

Written by Administrator
Sunday, 26 October 2014 15:17 -

'Hope for Zimbabwe'. Tuesday 4th November from 7 – 9 pm. Venue: the Royal Geographical Society, London. Hosted by the Mike Campbell Foundation with Ben Freeth, MBE, Christina Lamb, OBE, Dame Linda Dobbs (Chair). Tickets: £15. For more information, check:

<http://www.mikecampbellfoundation.com/page/events-2014>

Zimbabwe Yes We Can meeting. Saturday 15th November at 12 noon. Venue: The Theodore Bullfrog, 26-30 John Adam Street, London WC2N 6HL.

Zimbabwe Vigil Highlights 2013 can be viewed on this link: <http://www.zimvigil.co.uk/vigil-news/campaign-news/560-vigil-highlights-2013>

. Links to previous years' highlights are listed on 2013 Highlights page.

The Restoration of Human Rights in Zimbabwe (ROHR) is the Vigil's partner organization based in Zimbabwe. ROHR grew out of the need for the Vigil to have an organization on the ground in Zimbabwe which reflected the Vigil's mission statement in a practical way. ROHR in the UK actively fundraises through membership subscriptions, events, sales etc to support the activities of ROHR in Zimbabwe. Please note that the official website of ROHR Zimbabwe is <http://www.rohrzimbabwe.org/>

. Any other website claiming to be the official website of ROHR in no way represents the views and opinions of ROHR.

Zimbabwe Yes We Can Movement holds monthly meetings in London as the political face of ROHR and the Vigil.

The Zimbabwe Action Forum (ZAF) meets twice a month after the Vigil to discuss ways to help those back in Zimbabwe to fight oppression and achieve true democracy

Written by Administrator
Sunday, 26 October 2014 15:17 -

-

Facebook pages:

-

Vigil: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=8157345519&ref=ts>

ZAF: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Zimbabwe-Action-Forum-ZAF/490257051027515>

ROHR: <https://www.facebook.co/pages/ROHR-Zimbabwe-Restoration-of-Human-Rights/301811392835>

-

SW Radio Africa's website and sound archive is being hosted on www.archive.org . Go to their site and type in swradioafrica which will link you to snapshots of their site over the years and at the top of that page a link to their website where, under podcasts, you will find the audio.