

Sixth Anniversary of the Vigil

Written by Administrator

Saturday, 11 October 2008 00:00 - Last Updated Monday, 27 October 2008 23:07

Sixth Anniversary of the Vigil – 11 th October 2008

Friends from times past joined us in brilliant sunshine for the Vigil to launch our 7 th year outside the Embassy. Unfortunately Glenys Kinnock MEP was unable to be with us to receive our petition to the EU so we sending it to Brussels by post (see letter below).

Our partner organisation Restoration of Human Rights in Zimbabwe is foremost in our thoughts at the moment. They are trying to expand democratic space in Zimbabwe and you may have seen in the media how their struggle has been going (see our last entry). Ephraim Tapa, the ROHR President and a Vigil founder member, was with us to brief us on the organisation's bold protest in Harare on Friday. It is a new dimension for their campaign for justice and democracy. They are demanding free and fair elections within the next two years.

With the world financial crisis dominating the news, the Zimbabwe situation has inevitably slipped from the headlines. We were asked by several passers-by: "Why are you still demonstrating?" We regard it as an important part of our mission to make people aware of the situation when media attention is elsewhere.

With a large turnout singing and dancing on the Strand we certainly got noticed. Afterwards it was off to our local pub the Theodore Bullfrog for an anniversary party. Grateful thanks to Chipso Chaya and Gugu Ndlovu-Tutani for working so hard all day to provide very tasty sadza and stew for Vigil supporters. They were helped by Moses Kandiyawo and Dumi Tutani. Thanks also to Arnold Kuwewa who, in the absence of our chefs, had many extra duties. We were touched by the generosity of three ladies from the Zimbabwe Exiled Women's Association (Florence Matongo, Pauline Mutema and Ekiwa Chimedza) who unexpected provided soft drinks for the Vigil.

Letter to the European Union

"The Zimbabwe Vigil wish to submit a petition calling on European Union countries to suspend government-to-government aid to members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) because of their failure to help the suffering people of Zimbabwe .

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The petition reads: “ A Petition to European Union Governments. **We record our dismay at the failure of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to help the desperate people of Zimbabwe at their time of trial. We urge the UK government and the European Union in general to suspend government-to-government aid to all 14 (now 15) SADC countries until they abide by their joint commitment to uphold human rights in the region. We suggest that the money should instead be used to feed the starving in Zimbabwe** .”

As you will see, the petition has been signed by thousands of people from all over the world who have recently passed by our Vigil and share our anxiety about the crisis in our homeland. The Vigil has been held outside the Zimbabwe Embassy in London every Saturday since October 2002 in protest against human rights abuses in Zimbabwe .

The Vigil condemns SADC for recognising Mugabe as President when SADC's own election observers criticised the polls this year as deeply flawed. Mugabe consequently feels free to disregard a power-sharing deal signed last month -- despite the deepening humanitarian crisis. The UN says that about half the population will need food aid by early next year.

The Vigil wants the money saved by our proposal – and it amounts to many hundreds of millions of pounds a year – to be used to finance refugee camps in South Africa , Botswana , Zambia and Mozambique to which Zimbabweans can flee for their lives without fear of prompting more xenophobic violence. The money would fund food, medicine and education no longer available in Zimbabwe .

We are not, of course, calling for a halt to humanitarian aid to the regionfood, medicine etc. What we are talking about is balance of payments support which often goes astray. We believe SADC has failed to live up to its basic responsibilities and must share the pain of Zimbabwe as it becomes the country of the dead, the dying and Mugabe's Zanu-PF Party. We are grateful that Botswana and Zambia have recently begun to protest about what is happening but our

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proposal will benefit them in relieving their refugee burden.

The Zimbabwe Vigil Management Team”

FOR THE RECORD : about 300 attended.