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Encouraged by the popular support for change shown by the MDC demonstration in Harare on Tuesday, a group of exuberant Zimbabwe human rights activists arrived at the Vigil after a 15 mile walk to raise funds for the Zimbabwe Peace Actors' Platform (ZimPAP) which seeks to raise awareness and safeguard voters during next month's elections.

The walkers – members of the Vigil's sister organization Restoration of Human Rights (ROHR) wearing yellow tshirts – were embraced by colleagues at the Vigil. They included Margaret Munenge with her nearly 3-year-old son Ethan fast asleep in a buggy. She said he had run much of the way.

A ROHR statement said: 'Since the announcement of the elections, the military government has reportedly deployed 5000 soldiers in rural areas to instill fear. Traditional leaders are threatening voters with eviction from their homes if they do not surrender their voter registration certificates. Zanu PF campaigns are characterised by vote buying using food, money, farm inputs etc. Voters are being intimidated into feigning illiteracy or blindness so their leaders can vote on their behalf. The list is endless.

'On the other hand, the heavily militarised Zimbabwe Electoral Commission is refusing to disclose the supplier of the ballot paper, or allow its inspection or audit prior to the vote. This remains a contentious area given past experiences of vote rigging in Zimbabwe facilitated by the Israeli company, Nikuv.'

The Southern African Director of Human Rights Watch, Dewa Mavinga, was also skeptical. He said Zimbabwe risks having another sham election unless President Mnangagwa implements genuine electoral reform. 'A key step would be whether state media gives equal coverage to all political parties without bias or favour'.

Human Rights Watch says its research in May found security forces involved in the electoral process and said violence and intimidation by Zanu PF contributed to an environment that was

not conducive to free and fair elections (see: <http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/news/hrw-zimbabwe-risks-another-sham-poll-without-electoral-reform/>).

Two international observer groups have submitted a pre-election report to ZEC also calling for the urgent implementation of outstanding electoral reforms. They said that the military should publicly commit to recognise the winning presidential candidate whatever his political affiliation and called on ZEC to allow all political parties to observe the procurement, printing and storage of ballots (<https://www.newsday.co.zw/2018/06/zim-not-ready-for-free-elections-observers/>).

Other points

- One of the walkers was ROHR President Ephraim Tapa who paid tribute to Daizy Fabian who organised it and the 9 others who joined them. He said they had ‘walked through pain with determination and courage’ to help Zimbabwe’s struggle for democracy. Some had travelled long distances whilst some were coming from night shifts just to take part. Thanks to all the valiant walkers: Tawanda Chitate, Daizy Fabian, Chido Makawa, Heather Makawa, Patricia Masamba, Margaret (and Ethan) Munenge, Esther Munyira, Jenatry, Chihota, Patience Muyeye, Ephraim Tapa and Ben Tsikwa.

- The Executive Director of the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, Siphosami Malunga, says there are six make-or-break issues that will determine whether the elections will be free, fair and credible: the integrity of the voters’ roll; the integrity of the ballot paper and the vote; the integrity of ZEC itself; the creation of a conducive environment by repealing restrictive laws; the assurance that the military and other security institutions will play no role in the election and ensuring equal and fair access by all political parties to public broadcast media. Mr Malunga says ‘there is still time—albeit very little—to remedy these flaws before they deliver fatal blows and irredeemably taint the transparency and credibility of the very crucial 2018 elections. The window for fixing them is shutting—fast!’ (See:

- <http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/news/elections-six-make-or-break-issues/>

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- We are planning to hand in our petition urging the UK government to insist on free and fair elections in Zimbabwe before the UK offers support to Mnangagwa to 10 Downing Street at 4 pm on 16th June. Check ‘Events and Notices’ for full details. We are still waiting for confirmation that we can go ahead from the Downing Street police and will keep everyone informed on this.

- Thanks to those who arrived early to help set up: Junior Madzimore, Michelle Makoni, Barnie Mandimika, Rosemary Maponga, Nyarai Masvosva, Faith Ndhlovu and Caroline Witts. Thanks to Rosemary and Nyarai for looking after the front table, to Faith and Junior for handing out flyers and to Barnie, Nyarai, Junior and Rosemary for putting up the banners. Thanks to Nyarai and Michelle for extra photos.

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

FOR THE RECORD: 25 signed the register.

EVENTS AND NOTICES:

- **Save the Zimbabwe elephants protest.** Friday 15th June from 1 noon – 2 pm outside the Zimbabwe Embassy. One of our activists Nomusa Dube is organising a protest about the export of baby elephants from Zimbabwe to China. She asks Vigil activists to join her at this protest.

- **Vigil petition presentation to 10 Downing Street.** Saturday 16th June at 4 pm. We will hopefully be handing in our petition urging the UK government to insist on free and fair elections in Zimbabwe before the UK offers support to Mnangagwa. We will leave the Vigil at 3.15 pm and walk to 10 Downing Street where 6 petitioners will be allowed in to hand in the petition (subject to confirmation by the Downing Street police).

- **ROHR Central London branch meeting.** Saturday 16th June from 11.30 am – 1.30 pm. Venue: Royal Festival Hall, Contact: Daizy Fabian 07708653640, Maxmus Savanhu 07397809056, Siphon Ndlovu 07400566013.

- **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 us.

- **The Vigil's book 'Zimbabwe Emergency'** is based on our weekly diaries. It records how events in Zimbabwe have unfolded over the past 15 years as seen by the diaspora in the UK. It chronicles the economic disintegration, violence, growing oppression and political manoeuvring – and the tragic human cost involved. It is available at the Vigil for £10. All proceeds will go to the Vigil and our sister organisation the Restoration of Human Rights in Zimbabwe's work in Zimbabwe. The book is also available from Amazon.

- **Zimbabwe Action Forum** meets regularly after the Vigil to discuss ways to help those back in Zimbabwe to fight oppression and achieve true democracy.

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

- **Facebook pages:** Vigil: <https://www.facebook.com/zimbabwewigil> ROHR: <https://www.facebook.com/Restoration-of-Human-Rights-ROHR-Zimbabwe-International-370825706588551/>

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

Walking the talk – Zimbabwe Vigil Diary: 9th June 2018

Written by Administrator

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