

Zimbabwe Action Forum meeting – 30th June 2012

Written by Administrator
Sunday, 01 July 2012 13:17 -

Present: Brenda Chavandura, Itayi Chingwaru, Ellen Gonyora, Kelvin Kamupira, Fungayi Mabhunu, elma Majola, Georgina Makaza, Constance Mangwiro, Cephas Maswoswa, Wilbert Mukori, Wellington Muringai, Louisa Musaerenge, Beauty Musewe, Yoliswa Irene Nhamo, Grace Nyaumwe, Cecil Shumba, Peter Sidindi, Ephraim Tapa and Rose Benton

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The monthly Zimbabwe Action Forum (ZAF) met after the Vigil. Ephraim Tapa spoke about the position of ZAF – the difficulties of dealing with a country where everything (military, media, economy, security) was controlled by Zanu PF and the MDC, as part of government, was having to co-operate with their masters. This was compounded by the Zimbabwean army and Chinese defence forces controlling almost all the diamonds.

However the diaspora could do something from outside. There are lots of pressure points we can target, such as:

- Africa – Zuma, SADC (name and shame eg Sata)
- International – EU, UN, USA, China and Russia
- Zimbabwe – Unity government, people of Zimbabwe

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And we have tools to use: protests, petitions, lobbying, Vigil diary, social media, campaigns.

The time has come for Zimbabweans in the diaspora to stand up as activists and end the culture of grievance and complaining.

The meeting adopted a cartoon as a symbol for ZAF with the caption ‘The people don’t know their true power . . .’ showing a dictator pontificating at the end of a plank suspended over a precipice – only kept from falling by subservient people standing on the other end of the plank and listening to him. It was felt this was particularly appropriate for a group that wanted to act (see: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/zimbabwewigil/7478288032/in/photostream>).

We were pleased to hear from Thelma Majola that she has set up a Facebook page for ZAF.

We discussed in groups what action could be taken by the diaspora and the following emerged:

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1. We must continue protests, petitions, lobbying, awareness raising.
2. We should make more effective use of social media.
3. We should set up projects to win hearts and minds and give hope and courage to the people on the ground in Zimbabwe, such as: release of prisoners held without charge, more hygienic conditions for women prisoners, provision of educational needs – books etc. We should also do more to ensure our relatives in Zimbabwe know their rights, especially how to vote in the next elections. We must try to engage the youth of Zimbabwe to work for the right things instead on being mobilized for violence.
4. We need improve the circulation of information among ourselves and think of ways to raise more money. It was pointed out that the Vigil was non-party political and was separate from the MDC. MDC members (and members of other political parties) who supported our mission statement were welcome at the Vigil. The Vigil will support other campaigns if they tie in with our aims, such as the 21st movement protests organized by the MDC in the diaspora. As regards information, people were asked to check the Vigil's website and Facebook page and ZAF's Facebook page which updated information regularly as it came in. Any fundraising ideas were very welcome!
5. We should campaign for international observers at next elections – the Vigil has a long-running petition on this which was submitted with 12,000 signatures to 10 Downing Street on 21st April this year. We are still running the petition.
6. We needed an organization on the ground to educate people. The meeting was reminded that our organization ROHR in Zimbabwe was set up to do this. They were recovering well from serious sabotage last year and should become more effective as resources improved.
7. Co-ordinate with local NGOs on getting good evidence about human rights abuses and campaign for NGO aid to go to the right people.
8. The army and the police are propping up Mugabe – we should try to find ways to impeach

the generals.

From further general discussion, the following emerged.

- What is the Vigil's position on sanctions? We explained that our view was sanctions that were targeting a few individuals responsible for horrific human rights abuse were not hurting the economy of Zimbabwe – this was just Mugabe propaganda. Zimbabwe receives a huge amount of aid from UK, EU, USA and other countries.

- Mugabe's influence within Africa was discussed. The meeting was encouraged by the recent SADC meeting in Luanda where most leaders (not Sata of Zambia) did not support Mugabe's call for elections this year.

- We were told that long term detainees in the UK complained that the Vigil did not help them. We explained that Vigil was set up to fight human rights abuses in Zimbabwe and was not an organization set up to help Zimbabwean asylum seekers in the UK. However the Vigil works very hard to help Vigil supporters who end up in detention and are threatened with deportation. We have paid travel money out of our scarce resources for Vigil representatives to visit our supporters in detention. The Vigil is not a charity and the only money we have is from the generosity of people passing by our protest and the sale of some merchandise (shirts, flags and bangles).

- It was suggested that we invite speakers to future action forums.