

## **My dog collar stays off until Zimbabwe is free – John Sentamu**

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Mugabe's new constitution entrenches theft and discrimination. This is no time to go soft

On Sunday December 9, 2007, I took off my clerical collar and cut it up in an interview on *The Andrew Marr Show*

. I said I would not wear it again until Robert Mugabe ceased to be in power in Zimbabwe.

I made this prophetic statement as Mr Mugabe had slowly but surely cut the identity of the Zimbabwean people into tiny pieces. I did not expect still to be collarless five years on. I'm asked occasionally why I have forgotten to wear one — my answer remains that this corrupt and oppressive regime has been allowed to carry on for too long.

While the British Government seems to be considering easing some sanctions against the President of Zimbabwe and his personal allies, I am not convinced that it is time to weaken international opposition to his irresponsible, undemocratic, lawless and at times brutal regime. I certainly won't be placing an order for a new clerical collar at Wippell's just yet.

We cannot allow Mr Mugabe off the hook — we need to stand in solidarity with the people of Zimbabwe and not forget the abuses and exploitation they have suffered at the hands of his administration.

The Government's reason for this "step change" in relations is the work going into drafting a new constitution. The recent meeting of EU foreign ministers, which agreed to lift restrictions on Mr Mugabe's colleagues, made this dependent only on whether a "credible" referendum is held on the new constitution. Perhaps if they had read the draft they might have taken a different view. Among its many more reasonable provisions, it cancels the right of Zimbabweans to appeal to a supreme legal body to protect their fundamental rights. Even so, I am advised that the draft constitution has been signed off by both the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and Mr Mugabe's Zanu (PF).

Across the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) region people are standing up for their rights and the freedom to make their countries and communities prosperous and successful. Too often they are undermined by governments that attack the very foundations of the rule of law. Land clearances, broken contracts, bribery, extortion, dispossession and oppression are rife.

Only one institution in Southern Africa has the power to respond. SADC began meeting yesterday and senior officials will travel to Harare in the next two weeks to assess political progress. The SADC Tribunal is the only place where individuals, companies and groups can take their governments to an independent court. Last year, after pressure from Mr Mugabe, the tribunal was suspended then dissolved. This has denied people access to justice and protection of their human rights when legal systems fail in their own countries. By dissolving the tribunal, the leaders of these nations have colluded with Mr Mugabe in his denial of justice to Zimbabwe's citizens.

It is time for all communities and organisations in southern Africa to stand together and petition their heads of state to reinstate and strengthen the mandate of this court.

Zimbabwe's draft constitution also rules out compensation for land that the Government has taken from its legal owner. It directly prevents anyone applying to a court over compensation for land and says that land can be acquired simply by publishing a notice in the government gazette. Most alarmingly of all, it says that "the acquisition may not be challenged on the grounds it was discriminatory".

For the first time since apartheid was abolished in South Africa, we see a blatantly racist and tribalistic clause added to what may become the new constitution. Farmers and farm workers have much to fear from this.

Douglas Mwonozora, of the MDC, welcomes the move because takeovers will now be able to be done "legally". It would be tragic if Mr Mugabe's legacy is a constitution that not only permits but

actively promotes discrimination on the ground of ethnicity.

The SADC states stood together successfully to defeat apartheid. They must now stand together to stop human rights abuses and end government-sponsored violence within member states that has led to deaths, shocking injuries and huge displacements of people.

For three years the Mugabe regime has been propped up by the discovery of a huge diamond deposit. Those diamonds are blood diamonds. We need to see justice and transformation for the ordinary people of Zimbabwe — its farmers and workers. We owe them too much to give up now.

I do hope to wear my collar again before long, but it would be best if this is because free and fair elections have peacefully removed from office the president responsible for so much violence and destruction. The international community cannot turn its back on the people of Zimbabwe in their hour of need.

**Dr John Sentamu is Archbishop of York**