

Vigil founder member Ephraim Tapa opened the conference, saying that it was coming at a critical time. He had received a message from the US supporting the quest for a common platform for the diaspora. Ephraim said there was overwhelming evidence that the July elections were a sham. The opposition to Mugabe had been let down by a compromised and unstrategic leadership. He said there was every reason to be very depressed at the suffering in Zimbabwe: company closures, economy shrinking, hundreds leaving the country daily . . . A fully-fledged dictatorship was in prospect because Mugabe could ignore the opposition. Ephraim said that the diaspora must now assume greater responsibility for the democratic agenda. The 'pull him down' syndrome must end and the diaspora unite and agree on a common strategy to restore Zimbabwe. Ephraim said Zimbabweans were looking for leadership. They could not just wait for the death of Mugabe. 'The house is on fire', he said. 'We want our right to dream again'.

Ephraim introduced the speakers:

- Kate Hoey MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Zimbabwe, with a message of support.
- Muzvare Betty Makoni, award-winning gender activist – exploring the role of women in the struggle for democracy in Zimbabwe.
- Wilbert Mukori, political analyst and contributor to SW Radio Africa – talking about how the diaspora can promote democracy in Zimbabwe.
- Jaison Matewu, unsuccessful candidate for MDC-T, and Bie Tapa, recently returned from six months in Zimbabwe – witness accounts of what happened in the elections.
- Stanford Biti, Tendai Biti's brother.

Kate Hoey said the diaspora has an important role to play and must be united. It was sad that there had been international acceptance of the election results, knowing it was a sham. The opposition to Mugabe had been naïve in thinking that SADC would ride to the rescue. 'We will have to wait a long time for that.' Kate said the cleverness of Zanu PF had been underestimated: immediately after the GPA they had set out to win the 2013 elections – with the help of China and the Israeli company Nikuv. Some of the opposition leadership thought they were cleverer than they are. It was up to the diaspora to create a powerful voice to make the UK government listen – particularly about sanctions when they come up for debate in the EU in February. While they were in exile in the UK Zimbabweans must be enabled to acquire skills: 'We must find a legal way for you.' Kate said the diaspora had a responsibility to let the world know what was happening in Zimbabwe. She described the Vigil as 'a shining light these long years'. And added 'you have been right when politicians have been wrong'.

Betty Makoni said Zimbabwe will never be free until women are treated equally. It was not only the elections that had not been free and fair: the leadership in Zimbabwe had let women down. Women were the most vulnerable and were taking all the blows. She argued that women must share power if Zimbabwe was to be truly free. 'Men have not ruled the world, they have ruined the world'. To restore Zimbabwe it was necessary to restore women. Betty went on to criticize churches in Zimbabwe for endorsing the patriarchal society and added 'Men can't rule alone. We must rule side by side'. In response to a participant who said we needed to be aware that the NGO community were talking more and more of the need for re- engagement with the ZANU PF regime, Betty replied that we needed to be aware that the NGO community were mainly concerned with protecting their own jobs. Those who were advocating re-engagement with the Zanu PF government had only recently said the elections were not free and fair and were starting from a premise of dishonesty and compromise. The NGOs were moving the goalposts to suit their own selfish ends. Betty added that she had worked in the NGO environment for 10 years.

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Wilbert Mukori said the conference was a step forward for the Zimbabwean diaspora. A recent scene in the Zimbabwean parliament when Zanu PF blocked a debate on the elections showed that they knew that they had been rigged. The situation in Zimbabwe was desperate. Finance Minister Chinamasa had returned home from international financial institutions with nothing to show but his arrogance. Wilbert said the MDC had shot itself in the foot by withdrawing its court challenge to the election results. The diaspora should present evidence to the world so that it couldn't accept the election results.

There were eye witness accounts of the elections from Bie Tapa of the Vigil recently back from Zimbabwe, and Jaison Matewu who unsuccessfully stood for MDC T in Buhera West. Bie spoke of problems with voter registration and corruption. He said there was a widespread fear of the consequences if people did not vote for Zanu PF. Urban youths were prevented from voting. Jaison said that, on the face of it, going into the elections, things had looked ok, with an absence of violence. But he soon realised something was going on. Ballot papers were being doctored. There was multiple voting. If you dipped your finger in paraffin the ink would disappear. Three hundred blank ballot papers mysteriously ended up with a cross for Zanu PF. The MDC shouldn't go into new elections before reforms had been implemented.

We were grateful that Stanford Biti stepped forward to stand in for our scheduled speaker, Taurayi Chomboko, who was summoned at the last minute to a meeting of the MDC UK Executive with Tsvangirai who had suddenly popped up in Oxford. He spoke on the theme: 'Is it time for the world to move on, engage Zimbabwe (sociologically, politically and economically) and for a diaspora return to Zimbabwe'.

After lunch the conference divided into five groups to discuss the main themes. Their summaries follow:

## 1. What must be done to ensure free and fair elections come 2018?

FIRST – Look at what happened in 2013

### Zimbabwe Electoral Commission

- Accountability is essential
- Electoral processes must be reformed
- The issue of the (electronic) Voters' Roll from the 2013 election must be tackled with a **deadline** (3 to 6 months) being given for ZEC to produce the (electronic)

Voters' Roll

- If no (electronic) Voters' Roll is produced by the deadline then there should be calls for ZEC to be re-formed (on the basis of professional incompetence) and replaced with an INDEPENDENT BODY which is professional and capable of doing the work competently

### Justice System – needs to be re-professionalised?

- How do we tackle this?
- Get guidance from experts such as Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights who can inform us about what we can do to help
- Get assistance from Regional Court (SADC Court to be re-established?)

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**Media** – re-professionalism needed and a less partisan media (*government media favours Zanu PF, some independent media favours opposition*)

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- First TV has gone broke
- Only Studio 7
- Radios being distributed rural-wide (will improve access to news)

**Constitution** – Repeal of AIPPA and POSA needed

### Gold Standard for Elections

- We need to have an agreed gold standard for elections
- What do we do if there's an agreement to keep to agreed standards before going into an election? (And what to do if it's not kept?)
- Identify 'point people' in civil society, political parties, unions – so the diaspora can lobby through these people

### Voter Education

- Infiltrate political parties to get place/time to speak at their rallies so the importance of voter education can be highlighted

### Fear of Intimidation and Violence in Rural Areas

- Accountability – making people accountable for their actions
- Non-violence should be an accepted part of the election process

## **2. How to create and protect a democratic space**

- Pasture Mugabe and generals
- Political and economic blockade
- Need to engage SADC and inform them what we are doing
- Need to engage with international community
- Pull together all the election reports
- Engage with Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights on legal challenges
- Create a database of election results
- Get Zimbabweans to sign a petition / declaration that elections were not free and fair
- Conference must come up with a committee to take things forward
- Deadline to produce voters' roll

## **3. The role women can play in the democratic agenda in Zimbabwe**

- Women are 51% of the population. There are issues concerning maternity education etc
- However in cabinet there's only 20% presently. There is a clear cut division in party choice
- MDC and ZANU women must lock themselves in a room and tell men that enough is enough
- Shift the insulated mindset / no more victim mentality
- Speak up following the example set by the Rwandan women
- Create an organisation that supports outspoken women (with assurance you can do a lot)
- Tackle issues that affect women. Express it as far as politics
- The shame culture has made it difficult to find a way forward. Restore confidence within our own community
- Empowering programmes for women that relate to women across the board
- Feminism is there to support masculinity as opposed to working against it
- A good man programme
- Education for women is key

- Zimbabweans are in denial and ashamed of who they are

#### **4. What should the international community do in relation to Zimbabwe and its diaspora**

- The international community should be more open about its discussions on the position of Zimbabwe (ie less 'closed door') when the sanctions issue is discussed in February
- The international community should listen to the diaspora, civil society and the grass roots
  - Financial support should go to civil society and social movements in Zimbabwe (eg ZCTU who can mobilise people), ensuring that they are not Zanu PF organisations
  - Food should not go through Zanu PF
  - The international community should look at assisting Zimbabweans in the region
  - The international community should look at assisting Zimbabweans in the wider diaspora
    - The international community should put money into training opportunities for the diaspora
    - Support should be given to failed asylum seekers to give them training and education
    - Instead of deporting people asylum seekers should be given the right to work
    - Stop deportations
    - Zimbabweans on Malawian and South African passports should be recognised as Zimbabwean
    - Clear framework for European businesses operating in Zimbabwe

#### **5. How do we relate to the Zanu PF government during their 5 year term?**

#### **Negative engagement**

- International political isolation
  
- Civil disobedience - not paying rates, taxes, refuse to use services that support the Mugabe regime

### **Positive Engagement**

- A 'we need to engage the international community' voice with a unified agenda
  
- Strategic unified alliance among Zimbabweans and pressure groups
  
- Create a non-political process / democracy lobby group / international funding and government funding
  
- Hold ZANU PF to account with regard to their policies

### **The Stolen vote - whose vote was stolen?**

- Engage the international court regarding this stolen vote.

The day ended with a spokesman for the Vigil proposing the following resolutions: The conference

1. Rejects the 31<sup>st</sup> July elections as rigged
2. Calls on the diaspora to unite in demanding new elections
3. Condemns SADC for not ensuring the GPA was implemented
4. Appeals to the AU to revisit its approach the Zimbabwe crisis
5. Urges South Africa not to support the Mugabe regime
6. Advises the EU to continue the targeted sanctions against Mugabe and to expand them to include judges and officials of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission who have demonstrated bias for Zanu PF
7. Demands the Zimbabwean opposition resist Mugabe at every step
8. Asks the UK government not to send home failed Zimbabwean asylum seekers

A participant disputed the first proposed resolution on the grounds of absence of evidence that the voting was rigged and argued that the most that could be said was that the elections were less than legitimate. There was no time for further discussion. The proposed resolutions and the points put forward by the groups will be further examined by an interim Restore Zimbabwe Task Force facilitated by the Zimbabwe Vigil. Those who expressed interest in joining the task force were: Suzeet Kwenda, Stanford Biti, Wilbert Mukori, Betty Makoni, Walter Shoko, Ephraim

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Tapa, Rose Benton, Fungayi Mabhunu, Dakirayi Mtisi and David Kadzutu, Thandiwe Gwarumba, Peter Sidindi and Jaison Matewu (still to confirm depending on availability).

It was good to have with us representatives of the Foreign Office, Action for Southern Africa, human rights organisation Progressio and the Zimbabwe Association (which helped in securing the venue).

A big thank you to Christopher Kamuzonde of CK2 Catering Limited (07449150041) who cooked all night and served a delicious meal of Zimbabwean food. Christopher's services were provided free. Thanks to the catering team: Grace Nyaumwe, Thandiwe Gwarumba, Shyllette Chipangura, Mary Muteyerwa, Cephas Moswoswa and Patricia Masamba who worked hard serving the food and cleaning up the kitchen after we had eaten. Thanks also Michelle Dube and Rose Maponga who missed a lot of the proceedings because they were looking after the registration table.