

British diplomacy on Zimbabwe came in for a mauling in a parliamentary debate this week and there were demands to suspend any re-engagement with the Mnangagwa government, oppose Zimbabwe being readmitted to the Commonwealth and seek intervention by international organisations such as the UN, AU and SADC to get soldiers withdrawn to barracks.

The debate, attended by Africa Minister Harriett Baldwin, was led by the Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Zimbabwe, Kate Hoey, who said there was no doubt that the British Embassy in Harare had become too identified with Zanu PF.

She asked: 'Will the Minister confirm that Her Majesty's Government, and particularly the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, have learnt a lesson from what I would call the ill-advised cosyng-up to the Zimbabwean leadership, which owed its position, power and loyalty to the military and political machine that manoeuvred to install it and not to the people of Zimbabwe through a free and fair electoral process? I will not go into more detail; the Minister knows what I am talking about. There is no doubt that our embassy in Zimbabwe had become too identified, rightly or wrongly—I think wrongly—with ZANU PF.'

Ms Hoey went on: 'I want to make sure that the Minister realises that those of us who urged caution, particularly Zimbabweans who have long had to cope with the machinations of ZANU PF brutality and the manipulation of international opinion, were rebuffed by some officials in our embassy who thought that they knew better. I hope that we have learnt that lesson.'

A former Africa Minister James Dudderidge acknowledged that he had in the past accused Kate Hoey of being 'a bit pessimistic': 'Sadly, again, she has been proved right and a realist about the situation.'

Ms Hoey opened the debate saying: 'The systematic abuse and actual torture of individuals continues as we speak. The women who have been raped by soldiers have nowhere to report these crimes, because the rule of law in Zimbabwe has broken down.'

She continued: 'People were too afraid to move around, because of the burning of vehicles. They knew that many of the soldiers were doing this, but not in uniform. The Zimbabwean

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Government had the audacity to think that people would believe their story that these people had gone to army barracks or police stations, stolen the uniforms and then taken part in this activity. Of course, that was complete nonsense.

‘I could go on for a long time about all the terrible things that have happened, but there is no doubt that Mnangagwa knew what was going on. Whatever he has said about what he will do, nothing has happened—none of the responsible people have been prosecuted. For me, one of the most dangerous things is how the constitution is being completely ignored and the level to which the rule of law has been trampled on by the executive, the army, the police, the national prosecuting authority and some elements of the judiciary.’

Summing up the debate was an MP of the Scottish National Party, Peter Grant, who said the international community must intervene. He spoke of numerous allegations of women being gang-raped by uniformed soldiers.

‘The changing response from the authorities is notable and revealing. Initially, as always happens in such cases, they tried to deny anything had happened. They denied that there had been violence and said that such violence as there was had somehow been the responsibility of the protestors. Then they admitted that the police and army had used force, but claimed that it had been proportionate. A Government spokesman told the BBC, “When things get out of hand, a bit of firmness is needed”. It was only when there was incontrovertible video evidence that could not be claimed to be fake, making it clear that police and army officers were involved in assaults, that the authorities finally accepted it had been happening. Chillingly, the President’s own spokesperson said the crackdown was “just a foretaste of things to come”.’

The Africa Minister said the response of the security forces to the protests against the petrol price rise had been disproportionate and reminiscent of the darkest days of the Mugabe regime. President Mnangagwa must act to stop the abuses.

To watch the debate see: <https://parliamentlive.tv/event/index/1d5bcc85-bc13-42dd-9e2f-f6acb22f7750> and for the Hansard transcript check: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2019-01-30/debates/93C7CC8B-4AC6-4BD1-9278-A6122A767554/Zimbabwe#contribution-3405B70F-A832-4214-B10E-318F9F628139>

Other points

- In the debate Ms Hoey mentioned the Vigil: 'There has been a worrying trend recently, which may stop again now, of some of the Zimbabwean diaspora being sent back as part of the euphoria about the supposedly new regime. The Zimbabwe Vigil, which carries out a vigil on Saturday afternoons outside the Zimbabwean embassy and has maintained its solidarity and support for people in Zimbabwe, is worried that the Home Office is perhaps being too quick off the mark to send people back there where they could be taken into custody.'

- It was good to have with us at the Vigil today members of ACTSA (Action for Southern Africa).

- Support for Zimbabwean trade unionists came from the British Trades Union Congress who demonstrated outside the London Embassy on Friday. African trade unionists have also been supportive. The Nigeria Labour Congress demonstrated outside the Zimbabwe Embassy in Abuja. The Botswana Federation of Trade Unions have written to Mnangagwa calling for the release of detained Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions leaders. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) plan a demonstration in solidarity with ZCTU and Zimbabwe citizens on Wednesday 6th February at 9 am at the Beit Bridge border gate, Musina, Limpopo.

- Thanks to those who came early to help set up the table and put up the banners: Jane Kapfuwa, Alice Majola, Chido Makawa, Heather Makawa, Getrude Makosvo, Richard Munyama, Farai Murowa, Casper Nyamakura, Sikhumbuzule Sibanda and Ephraim Tapa. Thanks to Alice and Farai for looking after the front table, to Jane, Heather and Chido for handing out flyers and to Heather, Casper, Ephraim, Netsayi Makarichi, and Daizy Fabian for photographs.

- 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: 42 signed the register.

EVENTS AND NOTICES:

- **ROHR general members' meeting.** Saturday 9th February from 11.30 am – 1.30 pm. Venue: Royal Festival Hall. Contact: Ephraim Tapa 07940793090, Patricia Masamba 07708116625.

- **ROHR general members' meeting.** Saturday 16th February from 11.30 am – 1.30 pm. Venue: Royal Festival Hall. Contact: Daizy Fabian 07708653640, Maxmus Savanhu

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07397809056, Sipho 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 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 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.

- **Facebook pages:Vigil:** <https://www.facebook.com/zimbabwevigil> ROHR: <https://www.facebook.com/Restoration-of-Human-Rights-ROHR-Zimbabwe-International-370825706588551/>
ZAF: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Zimbabwe-Action-Forum-ZAF/490257051027515>