

## Report on trip to Southern Africa – Ephraim Tapa

Written by Administrator

Sunday, 07 April 2013 11:16 -

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Firstly, please accept my sincere apologies for not being able to be here with you, much as I would have loved. I will however definitely avail myself on 20/04/13 to, hopefully, take today's discussion further.

My recent fact finding mission to Zimbabwe and South Africa gave me impressions on a number of contemporary issues besieging Zimbabwe. These issues include the current political environment, the just ended constitutional referendum, the land reform programme, the health and economic well-being of the nation and Zimbabwe's readiness, willingness and ability to deliver a credible free and fair election. Whilst I look forward to sharing with you more on my thoughts and experiences in the days to come, this instalment focusses on the just ended constitutional referendum.

### Constitutional Referendum

I had the opportunity to witness the constitutional referendum. A day before the referendum, in Mwenezi, Masvingo I got to talk to a young man in his mid-twenties who informed me that

- 1) he and the wider community from where he came
  
- 2) they had been ordered to vote 'Yes' by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and that
  
- 3) apart from ZEC, they had seen no one else. He said he would not be voting for something he was not sure of. These sentiments were echoed by almost everyone I spoke to.

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I was able to visit a number of polling stations on the day of the referendum. Short queues formed in the mid-morning and by the afternoon, hardly any were left. In the following days, I was able to ask several households on visit as to how many people had voted in the referendum and results indicated widespread apathy. They stated that they couldn't vote for something that they were not privy to. Prior to the vote, parts of the civil society that campaigned for the 'NO' vote had been deliberately targeted for arbitrary arrest and harassment by police. However, both media and major political players applauded the plebiscite as peaceful and a huge success. All parties including the two MDCs claimed victory and dismissed the significance of the NO vote.

According to the 20/03/2013 Herald newspaper, the draft is now to be gazetted for 30 days, tabled before parliament and then Senate as a constitutional bill to be voted for by two-thirds majority in both houses before being sent for Presidential assent. Once presidential assent is given, some provisions (who decide which ones?) start working alongside the Lancaster house constitution. The new constitution only replaces the old one after the inception of a new government. Imagine, the upcoming elections will be held under the OLD constitution!

Questions to be asked:

- 1) Who is ZEC and how fit for purpose are they given the harmonised election around the corner?
- 2) ZEC reported an unprecedented high voter turnout, now being disputed by both civil society and the MDC T, why would ZEC cook the figures and would this be an indicator of

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things to come?

3) Does this tie in with the 2012 census figures (constituency delimitation) which are still to be made public Is it not surprising that all the three (four) principals colluded to ignore the police harassment of those who campaigned for the people's right to know? And what lies in store for them in the elections around the corner?

4) Will a new constitution make the difference in Zimbabwe?

A new constitution under the same old rulers, armed with the same repressive machinery (security, judiciary, militia, police, etc) and worried still on the prospects of being brought to book for human rights abuses and the plunder of the nation's resources, will not make a difference. For me, the constitution project was a diversionary tactic by the 3 principals and a waste of time. It takes much more than a new constitution to change Zimbabwe's mind-set for the better! Whither (to what place / into what state) Zimbabwe and its diaspora?