

## **Concept Note: Save Zimbabwe Now!**

From December 19-26, 2008, CIVICUS: World Alliance For Citizen Participation undertook a mission to Zimbabwe to:

- express solidarity with civil society groups in the country who are subject to severe repression,
- investigate reports regarding the breakdown of the rule of law and governance structures in the country, and
- gather suggestions for action and strategies by which international and African civil society organisations can provide support to civil society in Zimbabwe.

The mission members met over 100 church leaders, trade union representatives, community workers, human rights lawyers, NGO activists and ordinary men, women and children in Bulawayo, Harare and Gweru.

The humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe, as observed by the CIVICUS mission, is shocking and much worse than what is believed by the African and international communities alike. The country is facing an impending humanitarian disaster characterised by mass starvation and large scale unemployment. Essential services such as medical and health facilities, sanitation and water supply have collapsed completely, causing a spiralling number of AIDS and cholera related deaths. Civil society and political activists who dare to speak out and highlight the sorry state of affairs are subject to severe repression including a targeted campaign of abductions and other sinister forms of intimidation.

Zimbabwe has been ruled by President Robert Mugabe and his ZANU PF party cronies for the last 28 years. Over this period, the ZANU PF has not only manipulated elections to remain in power through terror tactics including use of military force on the political opposition but also precipitated a serious crisis in governance by distributing key positions on a spoils basis rather than merit.

CIVICUS believes that unless the crisis is resolved urgently, the following consequences are inevitable:

- Further exodus from Zimbabwe to neighbouring countries, potentially threatening economic, social and political stability of the Southern African region in particular and Africa in general.
- Increased likelihood of violence and vandalism, driven by sheer hunger and desperation
- Chronic food and medicine shortages coupled with the cholera and AIDS epidemics are likely to cause a fresh wave of deaths and further reduce the life expectancy below the 2005 estimate of 35 years. The effect of malnutrition on children is devastating and the country is likely to lose a whole generation.
- The infrastructure of the country is verging on collapse. If it is not addressed immediately, the cost of reconstruction is likely to rise sharply.
- Further diminish faith in democratic processes across Africa? Strengthen those regimes that abuse human and democratic rights with impunity?

A major finding of the mission was the deep disappointment amongst the people of Zimbabwe with the approach/policies of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Union and particularly the Government of South Africa towards resolving the crisis. This has been captured in a 14 minute film

produced by CIVICUS titled "Time 2 Act: An Appeal from the Zimbabwean People to the Leaders of South Africa and Africa". Zimbabweans interviewed by the mission constantly reiterated the view that the dithering of regional governments and the policy of "quiet diplomacy" pursued by the South African Government and SADC member states had failed to stop the Zimbabwean regime from trampling upon the rights of its people and was exacerbating their plight. Given the demonstrated intransigence of the Zimbabwean regime, almost everyone the mission spoke with, felt that the key to resolving the crisis lies with Zimbabwe's neighbours who, with the exception of Botswana, have been silent spectators and have thus acquiesced in the country's slow demise.

Upon its return from the mission, CIVICUS invited civil society colleagues from South Africa and Zimbabwe to a report back cum strategy meeting at its offices in Johannesburg on 7 January 2009. Consensus was reached at the meeting that the extreme severity of the crisis demands more vigorous action by South African civil society which should be much more vocal and visible in its efforts to force the South African government and other SADC governments to give up their policy of fence sitting in relation to the Zimbabwean regime's actions. Participants at the meeting strongly felt that it was time for enhanced civic actions escalating to civil disobedience to force diplomatic pressure on the regime in Zimbabwe.

### **Mobilising a People to People Solidarity Campaign for Zimbabwean People in Southern Africa and Africa**

Up till now, a major reason for the dithering by African governments on the Zimbabwean crisis is because there has been no major upsurge in African public opinion demanding an end to the suffering of the people of Zimbabwe. CIVICUS plans to catalyse a major high profile campaign to build people to people solidarity in South Africa, SADC countries and the member states of the African Union. It is hoped to mobilise at least 100, 000 people in South Africa and a million people in the Southern African region.

**The campaign will begin on 21 January 2009 with a symbolic relay fast / hunger strike to highlight the mass starvation and *passive genocide* being forced on the people of Zimbabwe through the actions of the regime.**

Kumi Naidoo, Honorary President of CIVICUS, who led the solidarity mission has volunteered to kick off the campaign with a non-stop fast towards mobilising public opinion in the region to build pressure on governments to influence the Zimbabwean state to restore dignity, human and democratic rights to its people. Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Reverend Paul Verryn of the Methodist Church in Johannesburg will symbolically fast one day a week (every Wednesday). It is intended to encourage as many people as possible to join the relay fast / hunger strike. Although, the event will be kicked off from the Methodist Church in Johannesburg, people in different locations in SADC countries will be encouraged to take part in similar solidarity actions to put pressure on the Zimbabwean government. To garner both media interest and public imagination in the cause, efforts will be made to attract ordinary people as well as high profile individuals such as eminent statespersons, activists, sportspersons, musicians, artists and other media personalities to join in or support the relay fast / hunger strike.

Although, the relay fast / hunger strike will launch the campaign, other solidarity actions will follow, including protest marches, candle light vigils, courting arrest through active civil disobedience, messages to key government functionaries and vigorous media campaigning. To build a groundswell of public opinion on resolving

the crisis in Zimbabwe, a team led by Kumi Naidoo in partnership with key civil society umbrella groups working both inside and outside Zimbabwe (including Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum and the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance), will visit different provinces of South Africa, SADC member-states and other key African countries. CIVICUS will activate its civil society networks to organise public meetings and media coverage at these events. Youth will be a major focus of the campaign and it is proposed to work with students associations and visit colleges and universities in the region.

**The solidarity actions will be driven by the following demands arrived at in consultation with Zimbabwean and South African civil society organisations**

- SADC and AU Heads of Government and principal political parties in the region must abandon the policy of quiet diplomacy on Zimbabwe. They must recognise that there is no legal government in Zimbabwe and the ZANU PF regime is in violation of regional and international treaties and conventions on human and democratic rights.
- The humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe must be recognised as a complex emergency evoking the *Responsibility to Protect*. Food must be disbursed through regional aid agencies to ensure equitable distribution, supported by monitors from SADC, the AU and the UN. African and international agencies must be invited to restore the failing health system and address the cholera and AIDS epidemic.
- The recent campaign of abductions, torture and other sinister forms of intimidation against civil society and political activists must be immediately halted. A SADC oversight body must be put in place to receive and address complaints of abuses by security agencies. Trials of civil society and political activists must be monitored by observers from the African Union and SADC. The fragility of the security situation in Zimbabwe poses enormous risk and challenges to the rest of the region.
- SADC countries must grant refugee status to Zimbabweans exiting the country due to the political and economic crisis. Efforts should be made to ensure their proper rehabilitation in host countries.
- The freedoms of expression, association and assembly must be restored. Regressive laws such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) must be repealed with immediate effect.
- The Memorandum of Understanding signed between the ZANU PF and the two MDC factions must be respected. The Global Political Agreement must be implemented in earnest by the end of February 2009, failing which a Transitional Authority should be put in place with limited terms of reference to:  
Stabilise the humanitarian situation;  
Take steps to bring the economy under control;  
Oversee the writing of a new Constitution;  
Oversee a referendum on the new constitution and  
Oversee new elections.