

The Catalyst

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A Time for Peace

On December 13-14, the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition held a two day National Peace Convention in Bulawayo. This convention was overflowing with messages of solidarity and hope. It gave the participants an opportunity to renew their commitment to peace. Participants used the convention as a launch pad for their quest for a better Zimbabwe. Church and civil society leaders who had gathered to share experiences and to develop strategies for peace-building left Bulawayo with high hopes.

However, events of the past month, have constrained some of the momentum which was gained at this historic gathering. Such events dampen the nation's optimism, and leave Zimbabweans wondering if another Zimbabwe is possible, and if so, when that might arrive. The challenge we all face is to stay positive and keep hope alive.

The following reports briefly chronicle some of these retrogressive events. Such events are an indication of the difficulties which confront all peace loving Zimbabweans, and which must be overcome if we are to move forward with peace, truth and justice.

Students' meeting disrupted

20 December 2002...Six truckloads of riot police disrupted the Annual General Meeting of the Zimbabwe National Students Union, (ZINASU). Fifteen student leaders were arrested and held in custody for two days. Police alleged that the AGM was an illegal political meeting held in contravention of the Public Order and Security Act (POSA). Yet in terms of POSA, private meetings of membership organisations, which are confined to such members, are not proscribed.

Mayor arrested

11 January, 2003...Harare Mayor Elias Mudzuri held a meeting with Mabvuku residents and Harare Councillors to solicit public opinion on the suburb's infrastructural needs. The police alleged that the meeting was in violation of POSA. They arrested the City Officials, and detained them over the weekend.

CHRA officials assaulted

January 13, 2003...Four Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA) officials, Barnabas Mangodza, Jameson Gadzirayi, Joseph Rose and Richard Mudewe visited Kuwadzana constituency in Harare. The four wanted to meet with the Chairperson of the Kuwadzana Residents Association, ahead of the pending by-election. Instead, they were abducted by ZANU PF militia members, and were brutally assaulted with batons, sjamboks and bricks. They were later "rescued" by the police, only to be detained for the night and subsequently charged under the Miscellaneous Offences Act. They were released two days later, after signing an admission of guilt and paying a fine of \$5000 each. A fine which they paid in order to obtain the medical attention they desperately needed.

Torture in Police Custody

January 14, 2003...Police conducted an early morning raid on the home of Job Sikhala, opposition Member of Parliament for St Mary's. The MP evaded the police in the first instance but was arrested later on that evening. At the time, Sikhala was in the company of NGO Human Rights Forum lawyer, Gabriel Shumba, and Shumba's younger brother, Bishop. The three were denied access to a lawyer and held incommunicado for two days. Sikhala and G Shumba were tortured

with electrodes placed on their tongues, feet and genitals. The two suffered severe injuries, and testified to the High Court concerning their torture in police custody. They were later charged with violating Section 5.2 of the draconian Public Order and Security Act, and in particular with attempting to subvert a constitutional government. There was neither evidence nor just cause for the course of conduct adopted by the police in this matter.

Kuwadzana Council Office Bombed

January 20, 2003...A Harare City Council office in Kuwadzana was petrol bombed, killing one person and injuring seven others. Within hours of the attack, 16 opposition members were arrested for the bombing. However, media reports present a confused chain of events, and blame has been placed on opposition youths, civil society organisations,

and escaped convicts, to mention but a few. While it is unclear what happened, the state used this horrific event to crack down on free expression in Kuwadzana by imposing a curfew.

Light at the end of the tunnel....

These stories depict the extent of the cycle of violence which plagues Zimbabwe today. However, in all of this, there is cause for hope. For example, on January 22, after having been accused of petrol bombing the Kuwadzana Council Offices, Amani Trust officials received reports that their offices might be attacked in retaliation. The organisation notified the police of these reports. The police responded with appropriate seriousness, and placed a full detail on guard outside the Amani Trust offices. Whilst this unique response exemplifies the spirit of the Police Services Charter, it has become rare in Zimbabwe to see the members of the ZRP act with such professionalism.

When Sikhala and the Shumba brothers appeared in court after their ordeal, the prosecutor forwarded the Court Report of their torture to the Attorney General and the Commissioner of Police. Thus, the prosecutor recognised the need to speak out in the face of brutality.

Incidents of terror and repression reveal a dark and violent side of Zimbabweans. However, in the face of this destruction, individuals and communities continue to pull together. They continue to find new ways to support their fellow citizens in need, and to say, clearly and loudly, "Enough is Enough!...Another Zimbabwe is Possible!"



*There is hope for the future...
another Zimbabwe is possible*

National Peace Convention Bulawayo, 13-14 December 2002

Why a Peace Convention?

Reverend Charles Chiriseri summarised the spirit of the Crisis in Zimbabwe National Peace Convention in his opening remarks:

“The challenge to Zimbabweans is to shun Stone Age politics that depend on who has a larger stick to beat with or a bigger stone to throw.”

Before independence, Zimbabwe was divided along racial, class-based, ethnic, and gender lines. The war of liberation was fought to rid Zimbabwe of those constructions. But efforts to free us from colonial rule were themselves violent. Thus, peace and justice became the biggest victims of the war of liberation.

Despite the rhetoric of reconciliation, 22 years later the vision of peace remains an elusive dream. Instead, are trapped in a vicious cycle of violence in which men, women and children--innocent Zimbabweans all--are the biggest victims of this culture.

The National Peace Building Committee is one of five committees of the Crisis Coalition. Acknowledging the current culture of violence, and the seemingly intractable

cycles of violence which Zimbabweans are trapped in, the Peace Building Committee organised the National Peace Convention, a platform in which Zimbabweans could gather and refocus their commitment to peace, truth, and justice.

The objectives of the Convention were to:

Encourage networking across denominations and throughout civil society.

Enhance efforts on peace, truth and justice.

Address the cycle of violence in Zimbabwe.

Develop a realistic platform for all of us to become agents of peace.

Formulate

strategies that enhance peace in Zimbabwe.

The first day was a think tank session, with 120 participants. On the second day, the plenary was attended by over 400 people, including 8 bishops from a variety of denominations such as Catholic, Anglican, Brethren in Christ and Evangelical churches. Over 70 pastors also attended. In addition, delegates from over 50 civil society organisations (including women's, youth, labour and municipal representatives) participated in the convention.

*We need to listen with an open mind, speak with a large heart and say:
Another Zimbabwe is possible!”*

Rev Charles Chiriseri

ACING OUR CHALLENGES

In South Africa, civil society and church groups learned some hard lessons on overcoming challenges. If we want to overcome the current crises, we need to ace our challenges. To do this effectively, we need to:

Face our challenges We have to communicate with our leaders and one another about the burning issues of the day.

Trace our challenges We need to look at our past and understand where we have been lead astray.

Grace our challenges We need to give hope to one another. Moreover, we cannot begin to share our values until we begin to live them.

Place our challenges We must become involved in debates of our people and encourage and empower them.

Erase our challenges We need to begin to dream again. Action without vision is a waste of time.

Together let us keep hope alive.

Dr David Molapo, Chairman SAA

CONVENTION RESOLUTIONS

The National Peace Convention opened up dialogue across denominational divides and outlined practical steps designed to address specific issues regarding the functional areas. Each of the working groups developed resolutions and proposed strategies for their specific issue area. Some of the key issues raised include:

TRUTH, JUSTICE & RECONCILIATION

Truth, justice, and reconciliation should be adopted as values in order to bring peace and stability to Zimbabwe.

We must work together to removing fear; and uncover the truth and record histories.

Commissions of inquiry on truth and justice should be developed, along with protective measures to ensure total reconciliation in Zimbabwe,

The media and the education system should be encouraged to promote messages of peace and tolerance.

REGIONAL SOLIDARITY & ADVOCACY

A vibrant regional and international solidarity network is necessary to develop consensus on the Zimbabwe issue and move towards solutions.

“We need a truly inclusive national unity based on justice, human rights and democracy.”

Pastor Goodwill Shana

Objectives include:

Active interactions and solidarity networks between local churches, church groupings and church societies internationally and regionally;

Strengthening the existing church dialogue locally and regionally;

Advocating for independent publications to spread correct information.

GOVERNANCE

Specifically, discussions about governance called for a restoration of democratic institutions and civil rights as well as the cessation of the politics of chaos witnessed over the last two years.

While participants recognised the natural factors contributing to the crisis, they agreed that Zimbabwe's crisis is primarily one of governance. This is manifested in the following several ways:

The flawed constitution works against the people;

There is interference by the executive with other arms of government;

Collapse of the institutions which are supposed to guarantee governance and democracy (judiciary, legislature, executive not promoting democracy);

Development of parallel institutions which are against the people (e.g. war vets, militia);

AGRARIAN REFORM

Participants agreed on the urgent need for agrarian reform, but insisted that it be a non-partisan, equitable and long-term process designed to achieve national development, social integration, political stability and economic growth.

Objectives thus included:

Immediate audit of the current land reform programme;

Defining institutional support for resettled farmers, involving all

stakeholders;

Setting criteria for recipients of land, and prioritise farm workers;

Establishment of an independent land commission;

Develop a National Freedom from Hunger campaign across all sectors and denominations.

HIV/AIDS

Participants labelled the AIDS pandemic a “crisis within the crisis,” as economic hardship, poor implementation of assistance programmes, and non-transparent disbursement of relief funds are exacerbating the suffering of those infected with and affected by HIV. A call was made for government's multisectoral approach to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment to be consolidated into an implementable plan of action agreed on by all stakeholders.

Participants envisioned of an AIDS-free generation, where the effects on the rest of the population have been mitigated.

Women's Voices for Peace

Women experience peace and violence in very different ways from men. Peace has different meanings for women. It has different meanings for men. The words of the five different women below are selected to show how they view peace. These are their demands for peace:

"We do not have street lights in our neighbourhood. This makes it very dangerous for us to be coming home from work after dark. Anything can happen. I have to ask my sons to wait for me at the bus stop so that we walk home together."

"In our culture, it is taboo to talk about sex. This makes talking about violence of a sexual nature very difficult. Who do I talk to if my daughter is raped, especially by one of her relatives?"

"This year we have seen things so terrible, I don't know if we will live. We thought the liberation war was ugly, but what we are seeing now is enough to make us go blind."

"We were told: 'you now have land.' So we went. We are poor people, so we built a house without a door. Just plastic, grass, and wooden poles. I left my pot inside. After all, it was my house. I came back, and my pot was gone. Who took my pot? I am a woman, and someone steals my pot. I want my pot back, I tell you. I want it back."

"What do you mean do I know what peace is? It is the opposite of war, of course. But when I have to fight for bread, tell me, is that war? If I go home without bread, there will be no peace in my house, so am I making war, or am I making peace?"



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