



NEWS IN BRIEF

- **March 11** — Police arrested around 50 opposition leaders and supporters to prevent them attending a prayer meeting at Zimbabwe Grounds, Harare. A rank-and-file supporter, Gift Tandare, was shot dead. People who saw the detainees after their first night in custody reported that they had been brutally beaten.
- **March 13** — The detainees appeared before a court, many of them showing visible signs of abuse. They were released into their lawyers' custody as police had not formulated charges — this was done later in the week. Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, spent time in intensive care with a head injury.
- **March 15** — Tanzanian president Jakaya Kikwete held emergency talks with the Zimbabwean leader in Harare. After the meeting, a defiant Mugabe told western critics they could "go hang". In a subsequent TV interview, he promised police would continue to "bash" opponents.
- **March 16** — Tsvangirai was released from hospital and went home, still in poor physical shape.
- **March 18** — MDC spokesman Nelson Chamisa was beaten by an unknown groups of assailants at Harare airport, preventing him from leaving the country. Other opposition members had also been prevented from travelling, including Grace Kwinjeh and Sekai Holland, who were injured in the March 11 police action and were seeking medical treatment abroad. The US State Department has said it holds President Mugabe "personally responsible" for attacks on opposition leaders.

A SENSE OF IMPUNITY



Credit: Lazele

MDC Deputy Secretary for International Affairs Grace Kwinjeh showing her bruised body and bandaged ear after suffering police beatings in Harare (14/03/2007)

A legacy of international inaction encourages Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe to believe there is no price to pay for his crackdown on opponents

By Benedict Unendoro in Harare

The universal condemnation of the police assault on Zimbabwean opposition leaders on March 11 is unlikely to move President Robert Mugabe. Ordinary Zimbabwean interviewed by IWPR say their president has got away with this kind of thing for decades, and the international community has done little more than issue protests from a safe distance.

Fifty opposition leaders on their way to attend a prayer meeting at Zimbabwe Grounds in the working class suburb of Highfield, Harare, were arrested and

then savagely assaulted in police cells on March 11.

The images of a badly beaten Morgan Tsvangirai, president of the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, that flashed round the globe this week may have jolted the international community from its slumber.

Zimbabwe's main opposition leader, Tsvangirai was in intensive care after sustaining serious head injuries from a police beating. Other prominent opposition figures also suffered serious injuries.

Tsvangirai left hospital on March 16. He and others had been released into the custody of their lawyers three days earlier as police had not completed the paperwork relating to possible charges.

Yet the new international outcry seems unlikely to alarm President Mugabe, given that he has not been swayed by similar criticism of his past actions over the last 27 years.

"Mugabe's story since independence in 1980 is a bloody trail of mass murder and the torture of political opponents," said Thompson Zhou, a teacher in the farming town of Kadoma.

"With such a track-record, why would Mugabe lose sleep over the recent round of condemnation over the torture of Tsvangirai and company?"

In the Eighties, Mugabe began consolidating his position by sending North Korean-trained troops into Matabeleland and the Midlands to attack supporters of ZAPU leader Joshua Nkomo.

Mugabe's story... is a bloody trail of mass murder and the torture of political opponents

The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace subsequently found that more than 20,000 people — most of them from the Ndebeli ethnic group which was ZAPU's constituency — died or disappeared during a five-year reign of terror known as "Gukurahundi" — which roughly means "sorting the chaff from the grain".

The killings received universal condemnation, but no international action was taken to stop them.

In the run-up to general elections in 1990, the head of the Central Intelligence Organisation, CIO, in the Midlands region, Elias Kanengoni, and senior ZANU-PF Youth League official Kizito Chivamba shot opposition candidate Patrick Kombayi, who had made the mistake of running against Mugabe's deputy, Simon Muzenda. Even though a Zimbabwean court found the two men guilty of attempted murder and the Supreme Court upheld the conviction, Mugabe promptly pardoned them.

In 1999, two journalists, the late Mark Chavunduka and Ray Choto, were tortured by the military for a week after publishing a report about a failed plot within the Zimbabwean army. The international community called for a

commission of inquiry, but Mugabe ignored the demand and instead praised the soldiers who held the men captive. The Mugabe government went on to launch wide-ranging attacks on whole sections of the population, defying critics abroad.

In 2000, Mugabe loyalists embarked on a campaign to force white farmers off their land, using violence against workers as well as owners and their families. Several farmers were killed and more than a quarter of a million farmworkers lost their jobs and homes.

The official rationale was that the farms were needed for landless Zimbabweans, but many believed the government was punishing the farmers, who were seen as part of the opposition to a controversial constitution, which was defeated in a referendum in February 2000.

The broadest attack of all came in May 2005, when the Zimbabwean leader sent police and soldiers into poor suburbs to destroy homes and shops in what he called Operation Murambatsvina ("Sweep Away the Rubbish") and characterised as an urban regeneration project. Once again, critics said the authorities' real intention was to destroy or disperse communities seen as potential recruiting-grounds for the opposition.

Victims of Operation Murambatsvina called it "Bob's Tsunami" because its scale was comparable to a natural disaster

United Nations special envoy Anna Tibaijuka reported that 700,000 people lost their means of livelihood and 2.5 million their homes as a result of Operation Murambatsvina. Victims called the campaign "Bob's Tsunami" because the scale of the population dislocation was comparable to a natural disaster.

Many Zimbabweans remain frustrated with the failure of the international community, and other African states in

particular, to take decisive measures to curb Mugabe's policies.

"We know there is no one who can save us," said a woman at the wake held for Gift Tandare, killed by police as they moved to head off the March 11 meeting at Highfield. "We can't even save ourselves because of the brutality of the state machinery. So we have no choice but to leave this in the hands of the Creator."

Within Africa, Mugabe has been under little pressure to change from fellow-leaders

Although the European Union and North American countries have imposed sanctions on Zimbabwe, including an arms embargo, the country has other sources of military and security equipment. China provides weapons while Israel has supplied water cannons.

Zimbabwe's cosy relationship with China has obstructed moves to address concerns at the United Nations Security Council, as Beijing simply exercises its veto.

Within Africa itself, Mugabe has been under little pressure to change from fellow-leaders. South African president Thabo Mbeki, for example, refuses to condemn Mugabe's actions and instead promotes a policy of "quiet diplomacy".

Mugabe has distanced himself from the African Union's New Partnership for Africa's Development, NEPAD, dismissing it as a western ploy to re-colonise the continent.

Tanzanian president Jikaya Kikwete flew into Harare for emergency talks on March 15. As expected, little came out of the meeting. Mugabe emerged as defiant as ever, saying that his critics in the West could "go hang".

Benedict Unendoro is the pseudonym of a journalist in Harare. ■

MUGABE LIKELY TO ACCEPT 2008 BALLOT

Under fire from all sides, including his own party, the ageing leader faces an increasingly narrow set of choices

By Joseph Tachiona in Harare

As pressure mounts for him to go, President Robert Mugabe appears to have accepted that his controversial plan to postpone the next presidential election for two years is unworkable, although he still appears undecided whether to stand again or anoint a successor.

Selling Mnangagwa as Mugabe's successor has proved problematic

Mugabe, in power since Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980, has been pushing for the presidential ballot scheduled for 2008 to be delayed until 2010 so that it can take place at the same time as the parliamentary election due that year.

Official sources within the government and ZANU-PF told IWPR last week that Mugabe had now acknowledged the open rebellion to this plan within the regime.

This recognition that the plan will not work was in line with comments Mugabe made to the Southern Times newspaper in early March, when he indicated that the presidential election would take place next year as planned, and it would be the parliamentary election instead that would be brought forward.

The concession comes amid reports that the veteran president, now 83, will stand for another presidential term if



Robert Mugabe in Harare, August 2004

his preferred successor, Rural Housing Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa, fails to garner unanimous support within the ruling ZANU-PF by the time the party holds its annual conference in December.

In the same newspaper interview, Mugabe said he would be ready to stand as the ruling party's candidate if it selected him to do so.

Selling Mnangagwa as his successor both to ZANU-PF and Zimbabweans in general has proved problematic.

The sources said Mugabe was keeping his options open on whether to stand for another presidential term, and would make that decision towards the end of this year, after assessing whether Mnangagwa had made enough progress in rallying solid support within ZANU-PF and nationally.

Mugabe has abandoned his previous hand-picked successor, Joice Mujuru,

after saying he had information that she and her husband Solomon were plotting a move against him. In a birthday interview broadcast on national television last month, Mugabe took pot shots at the "Mujuru faction" which he alleged was leading an internal revolt aimed at "getting rid of me".

The fact that even regime insiders have no appetite either for an early election or for a President Mnangagwa only adds to Mugabe's problems

The fact that even regime insiders have no appetite either for an early election or for a future President Mnangagwa only adds to Mugabe's problems.

He is under increasing pressure from African leaders and the wider world community to relax his iron grip on

Credit: Boldwill Hungwe/ZIMIND



An Israeli-made water cannon disperses people who attended an earlier MDC rally at Zimbabwe Grounds, Harare, on February 18

power. Despite the heightened international attention focused on Zimbabwe since the March 11 police action which left prominent opposition leaders bruised and battered, Mugabe has stuck to his defiant position, telling critics abroad they can “go hang” while promising to “bash” those at home some more.

Mugabe is under increasing pressure from African leaders and the world community

But even as he fends off these external opponents, it may be his own restive party that is the bigger threat. His options look increasingly limited — the ZANU-PF congress in December ducked out of approving his two-year extension plan and left the matter for the smaller Central Committee, which meets at the end of March, to decide.

IWPR interviews with members of the ZANU-PF Politburo — an even tighter decision-making body than the Central Committee — suggest that Mugabe does not face an easy ride.

“Gushungo [Mugabe] has made it abundantly clear that he now wants Ngwenya [Mnangagwa] to take over,” said a member of ZANU-PF’s ruling Politburo, who did not want to be named. “But then it depends whether Ngwenya would be able to win the critical support by the time of our conference. If he fails, then Gushungo would stand in that election.”

Another Politburo member agreed with this view, saying, “The restructuring which is taking place in the party is to try to consolidate Mnangagwa’s position, but if the plan fails Mugabe will go for another term.”

“If the plan fails, Mugabe will go for another term” — senior ZANU-PF member

Mugabe and Vice-President Joseph Msika are said to be in agreement that Mnangagwa should take over because they see him as a strong politician who would be able to guarantee their security once they go.

However, most senior ZANU-PF Politburo members are unhappy with Mnangagwa, saying the former state

security minister does not command enough support within the party or among the electorate to win a presidential election.

Despite this, the sources said, Mnangagwa is working feverishly to convince Mugabe that he commands support and can improve his image. They alleged that he was masterminding a plan to sideline provincial-level politicians who oppose him so as to position himself for the nomination for the presidency.

Instead of Mnangagwa, the Politburo sources said they would like to see technocrat Simba Makoni, at the very least as a running mate for Mugabe should he stand for another term.

Meanwhile, Mugabe’s regional neighbours — whose criticism of his rule has traditionally been muted — are becoming more and more vocal.

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Tanzanian president Jakaya Kikwete flew into Harare last week for talks which government sources said were aimed at discussing a “safe exit” for the ageing Mugabe. Kikwete was said to have been dispatched by his predecessor as Tanzanian leader, Benjamin Mkapa, who last year was tasked with addressing the Zimbabwean crisis by the then United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan.

Pressure to abandon the idea of a 2010 election has also come from South Africa. IWPR has learned that South African officials made it clear to Mugabe that an election that year, when South Africa will be hosting the football World Cup, was “completely out of the question”.

Joseph Tachiona is the pseudonym of a journalist in Zimbabwe. ■

CRISIS MOUNTS FOR CORNERED MUGABE

As the president orders a violent crackdown on the opposition, some say support for him is slipping in his own ZANU-PF party

By Frederick Tsotso in Harare

Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe is now like a cornered cat. Faced with a fast-imploding economy, growing opposition from within his ZANU-PF party and a more militant opposition, he has thrown caution to the wind and like a desperate feline is lashing out at those around him.

Zimbabwe appears to be degenerating into chaos as unrest simmers in Harare and other parts of the country, sparked by government-sponsored attacks on political opponents and an economic meltdown that is fuelling public anger against Mugabe and his ruling party.

Matters came to a head on March 11 with the arrest of Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, and other political, civil society and student leaders and human rights activists. They were detained as they were on their way to a prayer meeting in the capital Harare, organised by the pro-democracy Christian Alliance.

After their arrest, leaders including Tsvangirai and Lovemore Madhuku, the chairman of the National Constitutional Assembly, were badly beaten by police while in custody, according to supporters who gained access to them. Tsvangirai and others were initially denied access to lawyers and health care.

Political analysts had long predicted that a surge in police violence could



Credit: Lazele

Gift Tandare's brother (left) and sister Veronica at his wake in Glen View on March 17

shift the confrontation between the Mugabe government and its opponents up a gear — taking the fight out onto the streets where it could spiral out of control.

The ageing president has held out and rejects the opposition's demands

Following the March 11 violence, the unrest spread to the streets of Harare, the eastern city of Mutare, and Gweru, the Midlands provincial capital, as activists staged demonstrations demanding the release of the jailed opposition leaders and the ousting of the Mugabe government.

But the ageing president has held out, rejecting the opposition's demands.

Human rights workers, opposition leaders and international officials

argue that the chaos is part of an orchestrated campaign by the Zimbabwean authorities to ensure the re-election of Mugabe, an increasingly unpopular leader who has ruled Zimbabwe since independence in 1980.

"This is a political game that is being played," said Alois Chaumba, national chairman of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace. "There is no way we could have free and fair elections because of the amount of intimidation going on at the moment."

Tevedzerai Marecha, an office worker in the capital, said, "Seven years ago Zimbabwe was a wonderful country. Now we are in hell; we are slowly hurtling towards civil war."

The MDC, Zimbabwe's leading opposition party, said trigger-happy police loyal to Mugabe had killed three of its members in recent days, in what it said were politically-motivated attacks.



Credit: Lazele

MDC faction leaders Arthur Mutambara (left) and Morgan Tsvangirai (centre), with National Constitutional Assembly Chairman, Lovemore Madhuku (right) leave the magistrate's courts in Harare on March 13

The authorities in Zimbabwe confirmed only one of the killings — that of Gift Tandare, killed as security forces moved to head off the meeting at Highfield. Police spokesman Wayne Bvudzijena said Tandare was shot dead after attacking police officers on the way to the assembly

The court conceded that detainees had been tortured

Police claimed the meeting — organised by the Save Zimbabwe Coalition, an emerging alliance which brings together all the opposition parties, civic groups and church organisations — was in fact an anti-Mugabe political rally disguised as a prayer meeting so as to circumvent a ban on such events under the draconian Public Order and Security Act.

Lawyers representing the detained opposition and civic leaders had to file an urgent application to the High Court Chamber to gain access to their clients. It took a High Court order from Justice Chinembiri Bhunu for the detained leaders to be allowed to see their lawyers and receive medical attention.

In a serious indictment of the law enforcement agencies, the court conceded that detainees had been tortured. Justice Bhunu later issued an order demanding that they be brought before the courts immediately for an initial remand hearing.

As Tsvangirai appeared with other detainees at the Rotten Row magistrates courts in central Harare on March 13, he could hardly walk and had deep bruising all over his body and a massively swollen face. Several other detainees had to be carried into the court, and some sat on the floor. One wore a bloodstained shirt and all appeared dirty, tired and dishevelled.

Disregarding the High Court order that they be formally charged, the state refused to provide a trial magistrate, resulting in the detainees being taken back into police custody for a fourth day.

"These actions are symptomatic of a rogue regime that has lost all semblance of sanity and decency," Innocent Gonesse, legal affairs secretary for the opposition MDC told IWPR.

"Lawyers spent the whole night serving copies of the court order, but the police have simply thumbed their noses at the court and shown total disdain and contempt of due process."

Countless human rights bodies and key western governments, including the United States administration, have roundly condemned the police action, as has the European Union.

"These actions are symptomatic of a rogue regime that has lost all semblance of sanity and decency"

— Innocent Gonesse, MDC

The Zimbabwean government raced to defend its position, saying Tsvangirai and his supporters were trying to court international attention by breaking the laws of the land.

"Tsvangirai knew there was a ban on rallies. I think [he] wanted to be arrested, because he wanted more support from London and Washington," said ZANU-PF spokesman Nathan Shamuyarira.

Speaking from South Africa, Shamuyarira denied allegations of rights abuses in an interview with the public broadcaster SABC 2.

The police killing of Tandare, which the opposition has described as "cold-blooded murder", has heightened tension in the capital, touching a raw nerve among an already agitated population, reeling under the unprecedented economic decline that many blame on Mugabe's misrule.

Mourners at wake held for Tandare in Glenview, a poor suburb on the outskirts of Harare and a bedrock of opposition to the Mugabe government, vowed to avenge his death. There was a palpable mood of anger at the wake.

At least two opposition activists, Nickson Magondo and Naison Mashambanhaka, were shot by riot

police as they tried to lead a procession from the wake to a police station to demand justice.

Police fired teargas and used water cannons for several hours as they battled protesters at the wake, who were chanting, “Ndimi makauraya, hazvina mhosva” — “You have murdered him, no sweat”.

Angry mourners said police and security forces in Zimbabwe were waging a campaign of intimidation against opposition leaders in a bid to cripple the Save Zimbabwe Coalition.

Rita Sithole, who sells vegetables at the Machipisa shopping centre in Highfield, the densely-populated suburb where Tandare was shot, said she was shocked at the level of police brutality.

“You have murdered him, no sweat”

“How can they kill a person for going to a prayer meeting?” she asked. “This is the height of impunity. It goes to show how callous this regime has become.”

“These are the last kicks of a dying horse,” said another woman, requesting anonymity. “God will judge Mugabe and his police harshly for

stopping people pray[ing] for their country, which is clearly in crisis.”

“These are the last kicks of a dying horse”

Nyasha Moyo, an MDC activist, told IWPR at Tandare's wake that Mugabe's government had created a climate of intimidation and political violence to silence critics of his plan to postpone the next presidential election from a scheduled date of March 2008 to some time in 2010.

“We are not intimidated by these bully-boy tactics,” said Moyo, wearing opposition MDC regalia. “We want elections next year, and we will make this country ungovernable if they try to postpone.”

Tandare was given a quiet burial on March 18. Government sources said this was at his family's request, while the opposition said the rural ceremony was a ploy to prevent a large funeral taking place in Harare, which could have led to further demonstrations.

Mugabe, who marked his 83rd birthday last month amid great pomp and fanfare, announced this week that he would seek another term of office if asked to do so by ZANU-PF party, whether the election was held as planned in 2008 or delayed by two years.

Critics say Mugabe has mismanaged Zimbabwe's economy and violated human rights, plunging a once-prosperous nation into crisis. Annual inflation last month exceeded the 1,700 per cent mark — the highest rate in the world — unemployment is above 80 per cent, and there are chronic shortages of food, medicines and fuel.

“We want elections next year, and we will make this country ungovernable if they try to postpone”

Faced with a rising tide of anger, Mugabe has now fixed his eye firmly on the opposition, especially Tsvangirai, promising in a TV interview that his police would continue to “bash” them.

But analysts say change is likely to come from within his own party, as internal opposition continues to mount. They say different factions within ZANU-PF now see the president as the major impediment to their own futures — political and economic.

Frederick Tsotso is the pseudonym of a journalist in Zimbabwe. ■

The Zimbabwe Crisis Report is an initiative of IWPR-Africa's Zimbabwe Programme. This programme promotes democratisation and good governance with Southern Africa and contributes to the development of a culture of human rights and the rule of law. Focusing on Zimbabwe the programme has three core components — information provision, capacity building and dissemination and distribution.

The key purpose is to increase awareness in the Southern African region of the Zimbabwean situation and the implications for regional peace, security and economic development.

It also contributes to the development of regional policy, promotes dialogue and builds bridges within the region. It also raises the Africa wide and international profile of Zimbabwe in the context of the region.

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