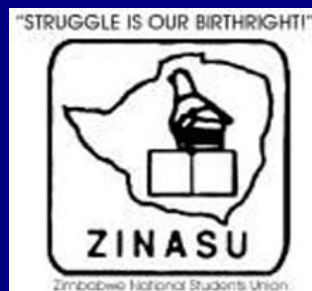


Zimbabwe National Students' Union (ZINASU)

STUDENT'S POSITION ON THE RESOLUTION OF THE CRISIS IN ZIMBABWE



**To : H.E Thabo Mbeki
REF: The SADC Initiative on Zimbabwe
The Government of South Africa
Union Building
Pretoria
South Africa**

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere – Martin Luther Jnr

1. Introduction

The paper is a strategic response/position paper from the students of Zimbabwe under the leadership of Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU) on the SADC initiative on the crisis in Zimbabwe. The document is premised on the need to find a comprehensive and sustainable alternatives to the legal, social, political and economic crisis besetting our motherland. It is our strong believe that the established order in Zimbabwe has become a negation and abbaration to the traditional founding values and principles of all the liberation movements on the entire continent. Mindful of the foregoing, it is equally our strong believe that South Africa has a serious and strategic role to play in the process of re-democratising the only country we have, Zimbabwe. Historically, Zimbabwe played a critical role during the aphatheid era in South Africa and the spirit of reciprocity and practical solidarity must not be put on alter for political expidiency of individuals. To this end we respectfully concurr with Kofi Annan when he says "*[Blame] [for inaction in the face of serious human rights violations] can be shared among those who value abstract notions of sovereignty more than the lives of real families; those whose reflex of solidarity puts them on the side of governments and not of peoples; and those who fear that action to stop the [violations] would jeopardize their commercial interests.*" ¹

2. What is ZINASU?

ZINASU is a voluntary and not for profit national union of students in Zimbabwe's institutions of higher learning. The union represents more than 260 000 students in 43 institutions including universities, teachers colleges, polytechnic colleges and agricultural institutes. ZINASU's mission is to champion and protect academic freedoms, autonomy of higher education institutions, and education as a human right through engaging other stakeholders, including government and college authorities in critical issues affecting education in Zimbabwe. Current issues included access to education and academic freedom, the deteriorating quality of education at all levels and rampant systematic and sustained victimization and persecution of students in Zimbabwe. This is done through three primary strategies, administrative punishments (mainly summary expulsions and suspensions of student leaders from tertiary institutions), arbitrary arrests and detentions and targeted use of organized violence and torture on student leadership.

¹ en.thinkexist.com

The union was formalized in 1989 when the students mobilized the nation against corruption, the one party state agenda and police brutality. Since then, the union has created numerous national leaders through its value system of leadership that thrives on people centered approaches that are pro-poor and pro-women in scope. As part of its work, the union has adopted a holistic approach to issues including scrutinizing government policy, intellectually analyze it and proffer ideas to the community.

ZINASU is an active member of the Southern African Students Union (SASU), All Africa Students Union (AASU) and the International Students Union (ISU). It has a wide network of partnerships with other groupings like the European Students International Board among other national unions

3. The Situation of Zimbabwean Students

Zimbabwe is currently on the brink of total collapse despite the country boasting of numerous natural resources which are being misused, mismanaged and looted by the ruling elite. The economy is perhaps the worst performing on the entire universe. Inflation is now pegged at around 3700%. A bizarre scenario for a country which is not at war, but perhaps it is because government is at war with its people. International isolation characterizes the life of the Harare Administration. Widespread poverty and hunger are chronic in everywhere. Food and fuel shortages are some of the major problems as recurrent droughts have left the Zimbabwean populace languishing in misery as it is mainly dependant on subsistence farming. The formal unemployment rate is pegged at around 80%, the formal working force therefore constitutes 20% if not less, and this section of the population is heavily taxed as the government has failed to generate meaningful revenue for the national fiscus due to wrong priorities, mismanagement and massive corruption by state officials. Currently the Poverty Datum Line (PDL) stands at Z\$1 500 000-00, yet the average salary of workers stands at Z\$200 000, which implies that workers are paid less than 15% of the average salary and wage. The informal sector and small to medium enterprises have been liquidated primarily through operation murambatsvina (drive away the filth) which was ruthlessly and efficiently carried out against the poor unarmed people by the uniformed forces in a two month high intensity war against civilians in May 2005.

The legitimate but controversially carried out land reform process which was done haphazardly, indiscriminately and for personal political entrepreneurship rather than to redress the imbalance in land allocation is also to blame for the crisis. Significant about it is that it liquidated reduced the work force on the farms from around 500 000 to only around 150 000 at the end of the chaotic expropriations in 2002 according to a research carried out by the respected Professor Lloyd

Sachikonye of the University of Zimbabwe². In other words workers and students suffered the most silently when this enterprise was undertaken. In light of the broad national problems above, students have not been spared from the brunt of such hardships as they are a part of society. The plight of the student is further worsened by the fact that the state no longer funds higher and tertiary education in Zimbabwe. Students always have to dig deeper into the pockets of their parents who are unemployed or are suffering underpaid workers. Fees in Higher and Tertiary Education are now unaffordable for many students. Most students have dropped out and have resorted to informal activities such as gold panning, fruit vending, prostitution and migrating to neighboring countries where they engage in the most menial of jobs and other illegal activities.

In the history of Zimbabwe, Students have played a pivotal role in national issues. Often questioning, critique, and debate on issues such as national policies, corruption and bad governance was the source of concern and hope for the students and the general populace. The same holds true of present-day students in Zimbabwe, who are by their very nature inquisitive, assertive and sensitive to contemporary national issues. Unfortunately, the state has intensified its repression on students. Students have often been labeled rowdy, marauding hooligans by the state whenever they query the present state of affairs in the nation. In recent times they have been labeled supporters of the opposition political party and enemies of the state seeking to depose the government and effect regime change. The state's response has been heavy handed and ruthless in thwarting student's dissent, often leading in death and maiming of students. Teargas, water Canons and live bullets have often been used to crush voices of disgruntled students. Student Leaders are constantly arrested and tortured brutally in Police and army holding cells and 'safe' houses. Suspensions and unlawful expulsion of student activists and elected leaders has reached unprecedented proportion.

The students of Zimbabwe, as organized ZINASU and the government had a fallout on the 14th of February 2006 when the government announced an astronomical fee increase of Z\$24 000 000-00, an amount which at the time was unaffordable for many, that was before the currency revaluation process which later took place. Shockingly, the previous semester, education had been free in the sense that one only needed to sign a registration form and an application form. The increase in tuition and accommodation fees was prompted by the state's failure to subsidize education due to lack of revenue and a massive reduction in the education budget, while the defense budget had been unrealistically inflated. Three quarters of the students were threatened with dropping out and eventually around 31.5% of the students left universities and colleges unable to continue with their education due to unaffordability of the new fees³.

² Inheriting the earth ; Land reform in Southern Africa, Sachikonye L.M

³ Report prepared by ZINASU : Understanding the effects of increase in tuition fees and incidence of student victimisation in Zimbabwe's tertiary learning institutions

The Reserve Bank Governor Gideon Gono, had in his January 2006 Fiscal review Policy announcement, stated that Parastatals and government institutions were draining the national fiscus and that they had to find sources of finance of their own. Thus all institutions of learning were instructed to fund themselves or find alternative sources of finance. Students' loans were also abolished at the same time, destroying the notion that government had a duty to fund and subsidize education as a national investment.

The new fee structure also compromised the quality and standards of education as it meant that the aspect of merit consideration when admitting students would be overshadowed by the ability to pay. Yet, ironically standards at tertiary institutions further deteriorated, lecturer exodus did not cease, infrastructure is in a sorry state, the libraries have become white elephants, a factors which nullified the government's argument that they needed to increase fees in order to improve the quality and standards of higher education. The budgetary allocation to areas so basic like education and health continued to get second priority to defense and state security. The government failed and did not take the slightest trouble to justify such fundamentally flawed prioritization. The students felt that there was no immediate and real danger and/or threat to the security of the country that justified enormous budgetary allocation to defense and security. Zimbabwe is not at war with anyone to warrant the high expenditure in the securocrats.

The students naturally protested the curtailment of their right to education and the Government's violation of the 26% budgetary allocation to education agreed to at UNESCO. Academic freedoms, students, student activists and leaders thenceforth faced a vicious onslaught from the government which accuses the students' movement of being aligned to the opposition Movement for Democratic Change.

The torture and abduction of student leaders with impunity by the state police and military is also on its rise in Zimbabwe. In 2006 alone 1 340 students were subjected to unlawful arrest and detention, 402 students were severely tortured, 29 students were suspended without a disciplinary hearing, 11 were subjected to death threats. It is also noted that all these students were also discriminated against on political grounds⁴. Because of ZINASU's legitimate demands and ZINASU's activism in the, **SAVE OUR EDUCATION, SAVE OUR FUTURE CAMPAIGN and the EDUCATION FOR ALL CAMPAIGN**, students have become some of the prime targets of state violence. Promise Mkwanzani, a third year Law student at the University of Zimbabwe and the current President of ZINASU, for example has been systematically targeted and persecuted by state agents who accuse him of being the architect of the unrest that engulfs the Higher Education Sector. He has been

arrested countless times, beaten, denigrated, vilified and denied his right to education by being unlawfully suspended from college for unexplained reasons and barred from sitting for his examinations. His efforts to get legal recourse have hit a brick wall as the University authorities continuously defy court orders with impunity. However, the future belongs to us and we can not confine ourselves to the ivory tower of defending academic freedoms in Zimbabwe. The students must play a central role in the process of finding solutions/alternatives to the crisis in Zimbabwe.

3. Proposed ZINASU input to the SADC mediation process on Zimbabwe

(a) Recommendations to SADC

The students union implores SADC to consider:

The need for the urgent resolution to the Zimbabwean crisis is more than evident , as has been highlighted by the numerous problems the country is facing which is also threatening the socio-economic and political stability of South Africa , if not the whole region.

Therefore, it is recommended that,

- i. South Africa as the leading member-state in the region, take leadership as an **HONEST BROKER** to the warring parties i.e. the ZANU PF government and the people. (With the active scrutiny of SADC member-states)
- ii. The South African government implores the Harare regime to halt the on-going barbaric terror campaign against perceived government critics. This is particularly important in view of the on-coming make or break elections whose credibility and legitimacy or otherwise are largely dependant on what becomes of this campaign.
- iii. Pursuant to the foregoing recommendation, it is further recommended that all political prisoners be immediately released (unconditionally) and all laws that suppress the free movement, gathering of people, and the free flow of information be immediately repealed, NOT as a pre-condition of the talks but as a foundation for a free and fair election whose outcome can earn respect as being accurate and legitimate.

⁴ Inside Pandora's Box: State of the Higher and Tertiary Education Sector in Zimbabwe 2006. A report by Student Solidarity Trust.

- iv. The Zimbabwean civic society including youth, churches, the disabled, women, business, labour be part of the dialogue process
- v. And more importantly, South Africa is encouraged to seriously consider the views of the young people as they have more vested and long term interests in the future and posterity of this country. Most of the Zimbabwean youth are swimming across the crocodile infested Limpopo River and forced to face the electricity fence erected by your government in search of a normal living and a significant number needlessly die or get deported and humiliated.

(b) Recommendations to the Zimbabwean Government

To the Government of Zimbabwe, It is recommended that:

- i. That ZANU PF begins to give the opposition its due respect, and grant the talks the dignity they deserve by sending a senior delegation that has the capacity to make binding decisions for and on behalf of ZANU PF rather than send a mere Minister of Justice fighting for his own internal political survival and relevance after his Tsholotsho debacle to oust Mugabe from power, which removed him from being a serious factor in ZANU PF other than being used to torment human rights defenders and legitimate political opponents.
- ii. To stop the campaign of organized violence and torture against human rights and pro-democracy activists and legitimate political opponents through immediately disbanding the secret hit squads, the Green Bombers and the Law and Order Unit of the police force under Assistant Commissioner Mabunda that has tormented people so much for no justifiable reason.
- iii. To start to address the real issues affecting the people i.e. the economy by first acknowledging that there is a problem whose real solution will only come from an all-inclusive and concerted effort and an acceptance that the country belongs to every Zimbabwean and not only those who sing loud praises for President Mugabe and his government's often dangerous policies .
- iv. Open up the democratic space for the media, Labour, opposition parties, grass roots movements, youths and students through the repeal of POSA and AIPPA.

- v. The process of developing a new constitution be deeply rooted in a people-driven process.
- vi. The electoral reforms must create an environment free from susceptibility to any forms of manipulation and/or exploitation by anyone so as to enable an election that will produce an outcome that people will recognize as free, fair, credible and legitimate.

(c.) Recommendations to the International Community

The international community, including the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union and other bodies are encouraged to mitigate the suffering of the Zimbabwean people.

Particularly, we recommend that they,

- i. ONLY move to re-admit the Zimbabwean government officials into the family of international leaders if the government of Zimbabwe begins to practically remove the sanctions it imposed on the people of Zimbabwe (POSA and AIPPA) and stop its systematic campaign of organized violence and torture of human rights and pro-democracy activists including the disbanding of the secret hit squads, the Green Bombers and the Law and Order Section of the police force.
- ii. Mobilize resources to mitigate the intensive food and medical deficit in Zimbabwe
- iii. Prepare to help reconstruct the socio-economic base of Zimbabwe, especially education and health with particular focus on orphans, widows, the disabled and the aged
- iv. Develop a capacity to provide post conflict healing and peace-building initiatives for the people of Zimbabwe
- v. Organize the repatriation of millions of Zimbabweans scattered in the geographical wilderness
- vi. Provide judicial expertise on the booking of criminals of gross human rights abuses since 1980.

(d) Our commitment

Our commitment as the students union rests primarily to Zimbabwe, the country. In the spirit of the development of our beautiful Zimbabwe, we commit to:

- i. recognize, respect, defend and cooperate with any government elected on the basis of a free and fair election without the obstacles referred to above
- ii. To help realize a social, economic and political order in Zimbabwe