

The Silent Majority... Celebrating the role of Women in Zimbabwe's democratization

Zimbabwe joins the rest of the world in commemorating the International Women's Day on the 8th of March 2011. The day was first observed 100 years ago as a struggle of women to participate in society on an equal footing with men. Celebrations are mainly centered on women's economic, political and social achievements.

It is sad to note that as the world celebrates International Women's Day, Zimbabwean women still face vast obstacles in their pursuit of development. Poverty, exclusion, violence and discrimination remain the biggest threats to women's progress in post-independent patriarchal Zimbabwe. Disenfranchisement of women emanates from the pre-colonial era when women were expected to be submissive to their male counterparts. The societal values that have been nurtured and cherished over the years are inclined towards overshadowing the transformation of women. The social construction of gender results from the way societies have organized work and distributed resources, including power.

Invariably, in Zimbabwe, women are allocated subordinate positions relative to men; the tasks they carry out are less valued though they tend to carry a heavier burden in social reproductive tasks. The imbalances that exist between men and women as well as asymmetrical power relations are thus considered political, since they determine the allocation of resources to men and women in a given socio-cultural context.

In Zimbabwe, women constitute 52% of the electorate and they are the ones that participate the most in politics, but when it comes to the government structures and positions that form decision makers, men are always on the fore front. The ERC conducted a Voter's Roll analysis in May 2010 which revealed that out of the 5,872, 473 registered voters, 3,025,113 (51%) are women. According to Women in Politics Support Unit (WIPSU), women occupy only 13.7% of cabinet, 14.2% of seats in the lower house of parliament and 33.3% in the senate. In addition, women occupy only 16.9% seats in both urban and rural councils. Women's participation in elections remains insignificant as their role has traditionally been confined to voting and supporting men who stand as candidates.

Obstacles to women's participation in democracy include:

- Gender stereotype and patriarchy

...to P2



Zimbabwean casting a ballot on Election Day. 2008

An Open Letter to the New Zimbabwe "Independent" Election Commission (ZEC)

Dear Commissioners

Let us take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment to this most critical constitutional body mandated with delivering democratic elections in Zimbabwe. This task has eluded your predecessor which is why we find ourselves in the

What's Inside?

- What constitutes Free & Fair Elections?
- Major highlights month of March
- How do I Register to Vote
- Cartoon on Free & Fair Elections

Send Feedback to: information@erc.co.zw

Visit our website: www.erc.co.zw

What Constitutes a Free and Fair Election?

A "Free" electoral process is one where fundamental human rights and freedoms are respected, including:

- Freedom of speech and expression by electors, parties, candidates and the media
- Freedom of association; that is, freedom to form organisations such as political parties and NGOs
- Freedom of assembly, to hold political rallies and to campaign
- Freedom of access to by and by electors to transmit and receive political and electoral information messages
- Freedom to register as an elector, a party or candidate
- Freedom from violence, intimidation or coercion
- Freedom of access to the polls by electors, party agents and accredited observers
- Freedom to exercise the franchise in secret
- Freedom to question, challenge and register complaints or objections without negative repercussions

A "Fair" electoral process is one where the 'playing field' is reasonably level and accessible to all electors, parties and candidates, and includes:

- An independent, non-partisan electoral organisation to administer the process
- Guaranteed rights and protection through the constitution and electoral legislation and regulations
- Equitable representation of electors provided through the legislation
- Clearly defined universal suffrage and secrecy of the vote
- Equitable and balanced reporting to the media
- Equitable access to financial and material resources for party and candidate campaigning
- Equitable opportunities for the electorate to receive political and voter information
- Accessible polling places
- Equitable treatment of electors, candidates and parties by elections officials, the government, the police, the military and the judiciary
- An open and transparent ballot counting process
- Election process not disrupted by violence, intimidation and coercion

Extract from: *Common Borders Fronteras Comunes, 2003-2009 commonborders.org*

position we are in today. Democratic elections remain a theory to most of us who were born after independence. We have only known one form of election, one which has a predetermined winner even if he happens to lose. One in which our vote counts for nothing except statistics which are used in turning our verdict against us.

Elections to us have become a dreaded periodic experience that serves to remind us how the country was extricated from the jaws of colonialism by the individual efforts of a handful of our illustrious leaders. We know elections as reminders of who is supposed to lead us not govern with us. Elections have also become occasions when pay back is "legal".

...P4

The Silent Majority... from P1

- Psychological and traditional barriers-men are superior to women
- Inequalities in education, training and access to resources
- Virility deficiency- women's conception of politics. It is for the stronger sex, those who have all it takes to compete in the turbulent environment, those who can use force and violence when it is required.
- Pull her down syndrome- women look down upon each other. In Zimbabwe, women constitute 52% of the total population and 51% of the electorate. Who then votes for men?
- Lack of affirmative action- there must be policies and action to stop discrimination based on sex and gender.

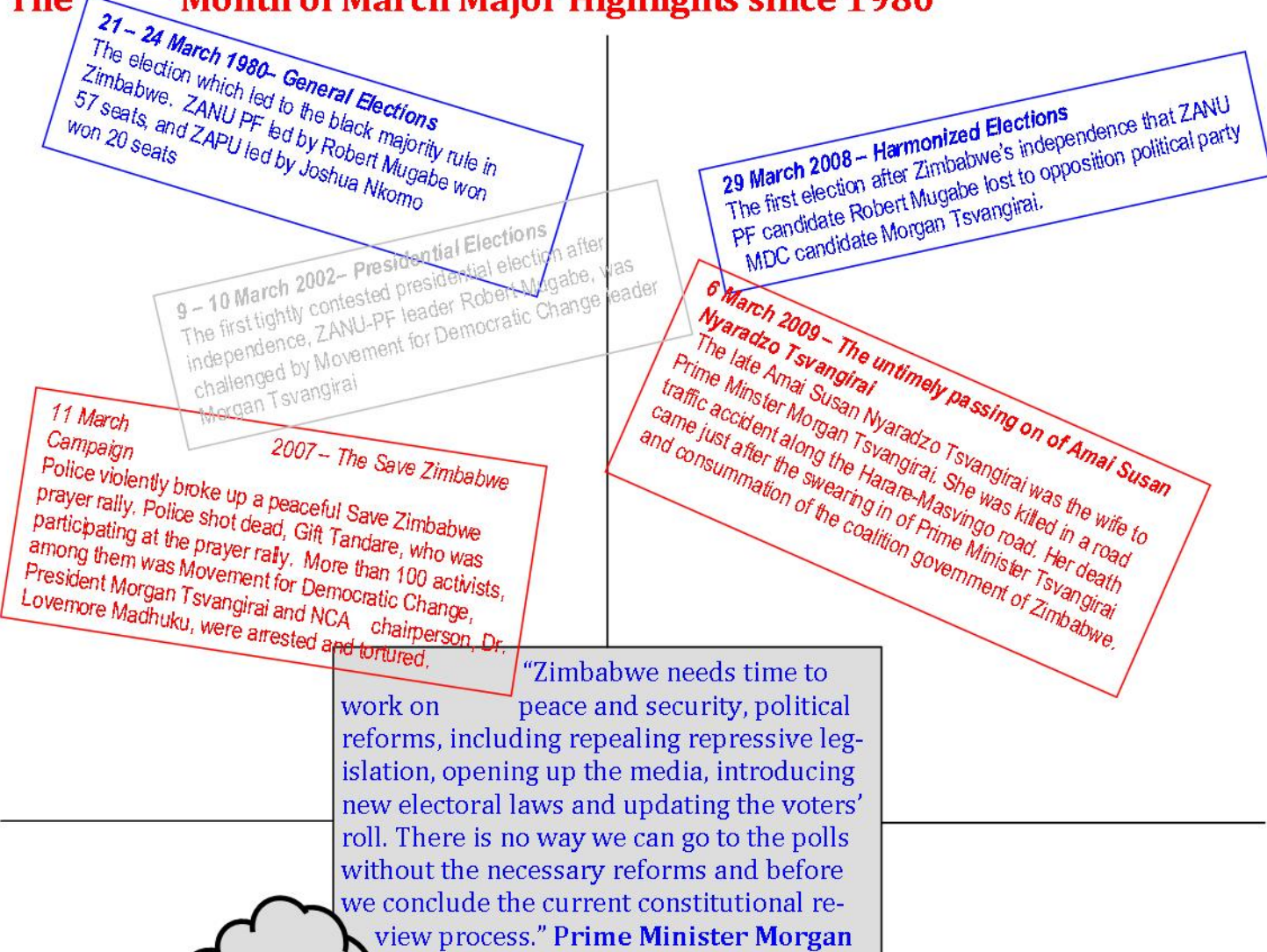
The Zimbabwean constitution does not expressly prohibit discrimination on grounds of sex. The Zimbabwean political environment still permits further subjugation and repression of women whose rights are gravely abused. In 2008, political violence erupted throughout Zimbabwe as a result of the contested national elections. Zimbabwean women, targeted for their political affiliations, were abducted from their workplaces and homes, raped, tortured and beaten in secret torture centers.

It is estimated that from May to July 2008, 2000 women and girls were victims of rape, (Research and Advocacy Unit- RAU- Report 2009). The local police ignored these women's pleas for protection and justice, and national leaders have been equally unresponsive to local and international demands for an end to the violence. To date, nothing has been done to compensate such victims of politically motivated repression. Violence denies women the right to personal development, security, respect and dignity. It is sad to note that women and girls have to bear the brunt of political violence perpetrated by vicious egotistical male leaders.

As the country celebrates the 100th Anniversary of International Women's Day, it should be reiterated that women deserve due recognition as active and equal members of society therefore Zimbabwean women are urged to resist all forms of discrimination.

"When women are fully involved, the benefits are immediate- families are healthier and better fed and their income, savings and investments go up. And what is true of families is also true of communities and in the long run, of whole countries." United Nations former Secretary General Kofi Annan

The Month of March Major Highlights since 1980



... and Where do I Register???



Registrar General's offices

When???

Registration is a continuous process ...

GO

Register NOW!!!

An Open Letter to the New Zimbabwe "Independent" Election Commission (ZEC) ...from P1

The fact that your father has longer beard than mine warrants beatings, looting, raping etc on political grounds. Differences are easier to define then than outside elections.

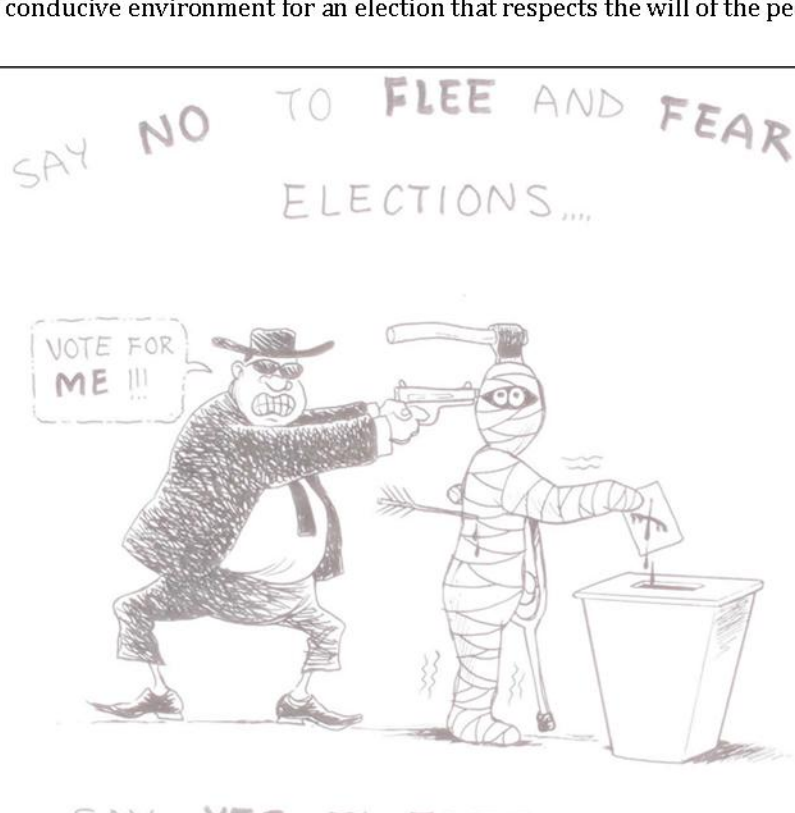
Zimbabweans still remember the stolen vote in March 2008. The country went through an internationally condemned election that saw hundreds murdered and thousands more displaced and persecuted. The wounds are yet to heal. The vote count, whose announcement took your predecessor over a month to announce, is still fresh in our minds. The arrogance exhibited by the outgoing Chair has left a bad taste in our mouths. Our confidence in election management bodies is at its lowest ebb.



Given the above context, your task is already cut out for you. Only yesterday it was confirmed that the next election will definitely pit the two political heavy weights of the past decade. The old man will once again face Morgan. Battle lines will be drawn as it must be made to avert the embarrassing defeat of March 2008.

We expect "paradigm shift" in the manner that you conduct your business. Preparation for elections starts now. Revamp the tired secretariat of your body. Dead wood must definitely pave way for more professional and non-partisan implementers of your policies. Contradictions between you and the secretariat will create unnecessary disharmony in the promotion of democracy.

The law clearly stipulates what you need to do. Take the task seriously. This allows you through Section 192 of the Electoral Act to make Statutory Instruments which are necessary to ensure an election is conducted properly. Use that facility to create a conducive environment for an election that respects the will of the people.



Do not be deterred by the Presidential Powers, Temporary Measures Act. Your advice against it especially when it infringes on the constitutional rights of voters, will be supported by democratic Zimbabweans. You will be judged by your actions.

It is your duty to complete Zimbabwe's transition to fully fledged democracy. We will be watching you.

Laying in wait,

Democratic Zimbabwean

The Election Eye is your monthly publication, if YOU want to contribute, get in touch with our information team on information@erc.co.zw