

THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY IN THE POLITICAL MINEFIELD OF ZIMBABWE

**A STORY OF THE POLITICAL VIOLENCE EXPERIENCED
BY
BLESSING CHEBUNDO,
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, KWEKWE
MOVEMENT FOR DEMOCRATIC CHANGE,
ZIMBABWE**



*Julius Caesar wrote: "I came, I saw, I conquered".
And I say: "I entered the Zimbabwe Political arena,
I fight for Democracy,
I will continue the struggle".*

My story starts with the Zimbabwe Constitutional Referendum, held on the 12th February 2000, which saw President Robert Mugabe's Zanu PF getting its first national defeat in the Political Arena and thereby setting the tone for Zimbabwe's political violence.

Sensing danger of a political whitewash by the newly formed MDC, Zanu PF gathered all its violent political might to crush the young MDC Party and its supporters. By voting against the changes in the Zimbabwe Constitutional Referendum, the people of Zimbabwe had taken heed of the call by the combined efforts of the MDC and the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) and had demonstrated their intolerance to the misrule of the prior 20 years by Zanu PF. As is

already known, the first targets were the white commercial farmers, their workers and the MDC activists. The whirlwind of political violence began with an opening ***bang*** in February 2000!!

I had worked with Paul Themba Nyathi both under the NCA and since the inception of the MDC, during the peoples pre-convention. Pre-convention is the period for intensive coordination of Civic Society organisations leading to the birth of the MDC. Paul was a member of the MDC's interim National Executive Committee (NEC), whilst I was the Interim Provincial Chairman for Midlands North. I had been chosen in absentia at the first Provincial Meeting on 27th May 1999. Members of the interim NEC were allocated Provinces to work with and Paul was allocated Midlands North.

On the 18th of March 2000, I had arranged for a Meeting at the Sandawana Theatre with local Kwekwe businessmen, which included white commercial farmers. The theatre was full to the brim, with the majority of the participants being whites. This was an indoor meeting of members from a cross section of the community. Most of our meetings were held in the open and attended by huge numbers of people from all walks of life. The guest speakers at the Sandawana Theatre Meeting were Paul Themba Nyathi, now a fellow MP and MDC spokesperson, and Jim Brown, a white commercial farmer and MDC activist from Mashonaland Central.

Half way through the Sandawana Theatre Meeting, a group of war veterans stormed the Theatre and started harassing and beating up people. The Sandawana Theatre is about 100 metres from the war veteran's offices, and about 500 metres from the Zanu PF Office. What had transpired was that two Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) operatives had attempted to enter the Theatre under the guise of being business people. When turned away they got upset and went to inform and incite the war veterans to attack people in the Meeting. A fight then ensued between the war veterans and the people attending the Meeting. When the police came, they did very little to arrest the perpetrators other than just to restrain them. The war veterans stole about 150 MDC T-Shirts, and later having donned them left for the commercial farms where they attacked farmers. Our Team, together with a few war veterans, went to the Police Station Charge Office where statements were recorded. Amongst the MDC white farmer activists was a young man called Ian Elsworth, whose father was gunned down the following year by war veterans at his Kwekwe farm. Ian was seriously wounded in the shooting. Two of the suspected murderers, Mr Masunda and Mr Sebastian Tshuma, were leaders in the attack at the Sandawana Theatre.

After the police recording of Statements of the Sandawana skirmishes, we learnt that the MDC Youths had organised themselves and made a follow up to the War Veterans' Offices where they recovered some of the stolen T-Shirts. In doing so, they left a trail of destruction of windowpanes and furniture. Later on in the evening, the war veterans went on a spree of destruction of property belonging to suspected MDC sympathizers and supporters. In the process they nearly axed to death a white Kwekwe Hotel patron, who was, in fact, a South African Contractor. He was flown to South Africa for treatment. During these raids, a Company called Birdale Electrical had its petrol tanks bombed. This was allegedly to punish the Director of the Company, Mr Dolf Landman, who was seen at the Sandawana Meeting.

The following morning, 19th March 2000, police came for me at my workplace, Sable Chemical Industries, where I worked as the Chief Environmental and Occupational Health and Safety Officer. They took me to the Kwekwe Central Charge Office where I was questioned in connection with the war veteran's office attack. Later on, another nineteen local MDC leaders were picked up and for the next three days we were kept in police cells before being taken to

Court where we were exonerated. Amongst the team were the District Chairman, Mr Abraham Mtshena, who was also doubling as our Campaign Manager, and Mr William Chanza, who later became the only MDC Councillor following a bye election in one of the Wards in 2001. However, the police did, not 'touch' all the known Zanu PF operatives and war veterans who committed acts of violence, property destruction, assaults, rape and murder.

During the period before my election to the position of Interim Provincial Chairman, I had led the Province in the Pre-Conventions, covering the area of Kwekwe Administrative District, which had three Parliamentary Constituencies, Gokwe Administrative District, which had five Parliamentary Constituencies, and Kadoma District, which had three Parliamentary Constituencies. This task fell on me naturally by virtue of my being the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union's (ZCTU) Vice Chairperson for the Midlands Region. The Pre-convention, and later MDC, had divided the Central Midlands Region into two i.e. the North and South Provinces. The South was under the leadership of Mr Bethel Makwembere, then the Region's Chairman of ZCTU. Since 1988, my special area of training under the ZCTU had been in training its representatives on Occupational Health and Safety. ZCTU had many National Union affiliates, and it served as the umbrella body. My National Union was the Zimbabwe Chemical, Plastics and Allied Workers Union (ZCPAWU), where I also doubled as its National Trainer on Occupational Health and Safety and as the National Treasurer.

So, it came as no surprise when I was elected MDC's Interim Provincial Chairman in absentia on 27th May 1999.

We had covered almost every corner of the 11 Constituencies of our province, Midlands North, before Zanu PF unleashed its war veterans and youths following the referendum defeat. As a new party, MDC had no resources, so we had to use our own resources, sometimes travelling by public transport and sleeping in the open or with sympathisers. I remember at one time my wife complaining that I was starving them in order to finance the Party with my meagre income. The only car available, and in good condition belonged to our Vice Secretary, Mr Sam Muzembi, a lecturer at the local Polytech. My own car was not in the best of condition and unable to travel on long and poorly maintained gravel roads. So, when Sam's car was down, we resorted to public transport.

At the MDC's Inaugural Congress, held at the end of February 2000, I was elected to the Party's National Executive Committee (NEC), representing Midlands North Province. My then Deputy, Mr Isaac Mzimba, took over the Province as Acting Chairman.

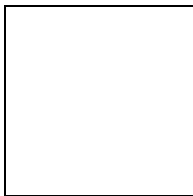
Around April 2000, it was time for the Political Parties to look for their Parliamentary Candidates. MDC had a selection process called the 'Consensus Process' where interested individuals, together with the people, would discuss until they agreed on 'Sufficient Consensus' on who should represent the Party. This process was used as opposed to carrying out of Primary elections. This was healthy for a young Party in order to avoid unnecessary differences that would have divided people.

However, the situation was different in Kwekwe. There were no takers. I, personally, had no interest in the Parliamentary seat in the first place. I was happy remaining a Party Leader in the area, helping to shape democracy. I was also a known leading local Salvation Army church leader, and did not think it wise to mix my church activities with Parliamentary activities. So, I had opted out of the race.

It, however, proved that the 'no-taker' syndrome for Kwekwe was nothing other than the result of fear, by the people, to contest Zanu PF's, Emmerson Mnangagwa, the then Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs. Mnangagwa had been the sitting MP for Kwekwe since Independence in 1980. He had been the Zanu PF Secretary for Finance and Administration during the first decade of Independence, the Minister of Security, heading the most feared and notorious Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO). He was known to have masterminded the mid 1980's massacre of the Ndebeles and anti-Zanu PF people in the Matabeleland and Midlands areas. He was the most feared senior member of Zanu PF and he was referred to as 'Chinyavada', which means **Scorpion**, or 'Angel of Death'. Those who had dared to cross his path were known to have either disappeared or to have met with a mysterious death.

So, at the end of the day, I had no choice but to take the bull by the horns and go for the seat. People said, 'you are the most senior person, you have to go for it '. And I went for it though, rather casually. It proved to be the 'David and Goliath' story of the Bible as, I won, but, not before I had gone to hell and back!

Between April and May 2000, the nomination time, Mnangagwa became interested in knowing who the MDC Candidate was. We had kept it secret for obvious reasons, however, through their intelligence sources, the CIO, they found out I was the MDC Candidate. After that a lot of things started to happen to our Campaign Manager, Mr Mtshena and me.



MDC Rally at Sherwood Clinic

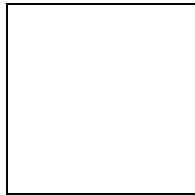
In early April 2000, whilst at work, I received a call from the Assistant Air Force Commander Vice Air-Marshall Henry Muchena, who had all sorts of excuses as to why he wanted to meet with me concerning my possible challenge to Mnangagwa. I had never talked or met with him before and I turned down the request for a Meeting. From then on, I received a lot of either threatening or enticing calls at work and at home. One such call offered me \$700 000, yet another, \$3.7 million for me to withdraw my candidature. I declined all such offers!

Then, I began to notice that I was being followed either by foot or by car wherever I went. It was about 500 metres walk from town to my company house in New Town. One Sunday morning, I received an informative call laying out the strategies that had been planned in order to eliminate me. It was revealed that Mnangagwa had hired people from Zhombe and Silobela who were tasked to carry out my assassination. Mnangagwa was no longer trusting the Kwekwe people whom he alleged did not want him any longer. Indeed, this had been demonstrated during Zanu PF's primary elections when, for the first time in history, two people had wanted to contest him. He is reported to have dictated that there would be no primary election and he sailed in as the Zanu PF candidate unopposed.

These gangs of hired thugs, under the leadership of a Retired Army Major Makombe, also known as Chapwanya, Retired Brigadier Mabenge and Mr Owen 'Mudha' Ncube, a Zanu PF operative informer who worked closely with the CIO, would be organised into small groups and assigned strategic areas where I was known to likely visit or frequent. They would pounce and

kill at the appropriate time. Mnangagwa himself, had instructed the police not to interfere or arrest those attacking MDC people and in particular, those attacking 'Chebundo'.

It was fortunate for me that some of the hired thugs did not know me personally and relied on a description of my appearance. On many occasions, they only identified me once I was well out of site. One day on my way to Amaveni Salvation Army Church, four men asked me about Chebundo's whereabouts. They had been told that I dressed in cream church suits but on that day I was dressed in my grey church safari suit and they did not recognise me. I realised that these were some of the thugs hired to murder me and so I lied to them and said that 'Chebundo' was attending a church leadership meeting in one of the Sections at Globe and Phoenix. They left in the direction of Globe and Phoenix obviously to sort out 'Chebundo'! I was advised by a fellow Churchgoer at the Amaveni Church, who was a Zanu PF official, to leave for my own safety, and not to come back to the church until the elections were over. He was sympathetic to my plight and knew what strategies had been put in place so I complied with his request.



Ready for Church in my 'cream' safari suite!

One evening I decided to take a risk and walk from home to a late closing supermarket in town. It was around 7 pm and I had anticipated that these thugs would not look for me in the evening. I made a near fatal mistake! As I left the supermarket, I noticed two strange people looking at me rather suspiciously. They were nodding to each other and seemed to be giving call signs to others. I nervously started to walk faster but soon realised that they were keeping pace with me on both sides of the street, as well as to the rear of me, though, at a distance. I realised they probably wanted to use the area between town and my home, which was quiet and dark, to attack me. I started to run but they also began running. I changed direction towards town with them still in pursuit but at a distance. I saw a taxi and jumped in, instructing the driver to drive me home. As I looked back, I saw the group jumping into an open Mazda pickup with army number plates and they began to tail the taxi. I decided to tell the driver about the whole episode. He was a bit scared and did not want to be involved but I told him that he would not be spared either if he was caught. We changed direction twice with the truck in pursuit. A bit out of town at a dark, bushy area, I dropped out of the taxi and disappeared into the thick bush. The taxi driver made a 'U' turn but was confronted by the Mazda truck and its occupants. He was to tell me after the elections that he got a beating and revealed to them that I had run into the bush. With that information, two men kept guard on the taxi driver while the rest of the thugs began a search for me. I could not walk or run fast because the bush was very thick and noisy. I stumbled on a hole and made use of it, going in legs first. It was probably a hole dug by a wild animal. It never crossed my mind to be afraid of what was down that hole as I was already so terrified of what was outside the hole! I feverishly prayed to God the Almighty and talked to my Ancestors. I could hear the men talking in harsh but low voices, swearing at me, upset I had outwitted them and they would not receive the big payout they had been promised for my murder. I was about 40 metres from the road and could dimly see the car but the men were still searching deep into the bush. They must have thought I had gone for they seemed to abandon the search and the car drove off. I checked my time using the watch

light and discovered that it was after 11 pm. The chase had started around 7 pm. I decided to stay put fearing that they might have left some men behind. Meanwhile I was sure that my wife was extremely worried about my whereabouts. I was equally concerned for her and the children's safety. She would tell me later that she telephoned all our friends and the MDC leaders but was scared to telephone the police, knowing that they had their wings clipped and some of them were Zanu PF operatives or War Veterans.

At around 2 am, it started raining. I came out of the hole and calculated that even if some of the men had been left as sentries on the road, they would not stand in the heavy rain. I took a calculated risk and started manoeuvring through the bush slowly, soaked and dirty. I got home at around 3 am looking more like a miner. My wife thought the condition was a result of an attack and she started crying. I comforted her and told her all about the ordeal. I felt for her concern and I too cried from the heart and with relief.

After this experience, the local party leadership decided that my movements should be restricted to Party and work business only, where most of the time I would not be alone. This worked a little until Tuesday 9th May 2000 when, at around 7 am, I left home for a Sable Staff bus station, some 200 metres from my house. I arrived at the pick up point and joined three workmates who were already there. These workmates included two with physical disabilities, one a former Zanu PF Kwekwe Mayor, Mr Bruno Mutandwa, and a white sable employee, Mr Aubrey Hartmann. At this point, around 0715 hours, when we were still waiting for the contract bus, five young men, some dressed in overalls, suddenly arrived. They quickly surrounded me, cornering me by the fence of a nearby house. One of them, whom I only knew as Peter and hailed from Amaveni Suburb of Kwekwe, extended his hand to greet me. I was suspicious of his motive so I declined and did not extend my hand. Peter then accused me of wanting to topple Mhangagwa and Zanu PF from Kwekwe. All of a sudden, the men took out grass slashers and knobkerries from their overalls and started to attack me. Three other men appeared from the corner of the security fence where they were probably hiding behind the thick hedge. They were holding what looked like containers. The attack continued and I tried my best to dodge and block. It appeared that the men had not planned well as, everyone was in very close contact and they appeared to be getting in each other's way in their attempts to find a killing blow. At one stage though, a pick handle caught me on my left shoulder and I staggered, landing on the ground with my right hand. As I struggled to get up, a can of petrol was poured over me and it spread all over my whole body. With petrol splashed in my eyes I could hardly see but I heard one of them calling for the matches. At that moment I sensed death and realised that if I did not act fast, I would be burnt alive. My mind flashed to the incident of 9th April 2000, when Tichaona Chiminya, the MDC President's Aid, and Talent Mabika, an activist, were doused with petrol in Buhera District and burnt to death. I had known and worked with Tichaona for 15 years in the Chemical Workers Union. He was a full time organiser with the Union, and I was on the National Executive Board. Five days before his death, it was I who had signed his application for leave to give him time to campaign for Mr Morgan Tsvangirai, the MDC President.

So, when the call for matches was made, I quickly wiped petrol from my face and saw the man holding the matches. He was struggling to light the match as his hands were trembling badly and the matchbox had been soaked with petrol. I dived for him head first and grappled with him, at the same time screaming at the men that I was going to burn together with him. The two of us struggled, with the other men kicking me and trying desperately to separate the two of us. I held on to the man using him as a shield to block the intended knobkerrie beatings. I knew he was my only hope of salvation. In the ensuing battle, I managed to grab one of the grass slashers and with a high-pitched warrior voice, I let out a mighty war cry and leapt into

the fray, swinging the slasher violently through the air I somehow managed to hit one of the men. He staggered and immediately took to his heels. The rest of the cowardly pack panicked and followed suit. This entire ordeal lasted approximately three minutes!! I was later informed that a pick-up truck, owned and driven by my neighbour, also a fellow Salvation Army Church Member and a Zanu PF Councillor, Mr Job Kahondo, whisked away the gang after they had fled the scene.

As the men left, I looked at the surroundings and myself. I discovered that I was shirtless. My shirt had been torn from my body and was now shredded to pieces, and my trousers, head and body were all covered in petrol and dirt. When the contract bus arrived some five minutes later, I was given a jersey by one of my colleagues who had boarded the bus earlier. From my workplace the Company Security Officer accompanied me to the Police Station where I made a report.

The Police Officers investigating the case were: Constable Chibike, Sergeant Nzira, Sergeant Muromba and Sergeant Chaminuka. The latter, so it later turned out, was working in collaboration with the local Zanu PF Office. For example, he would establish that I was not armed and passed this information to the gangs assigned to assassinate me.

Apart from the bruises and swellings, mostly on the back and hands, I physically suffered some internal right inner ear injuries, which was due to petrol, which had found its way into my inner ear. As for the police, no arrest had been made by the time the so-called Presidential Pardon for political violence cases was announced after the elections.

On Saturday, 13th May 2000, I was in Harare attending an MDC National Council Meeting, when I received a call that the District Chairman, Mr Mtshena, had had his house burnt down by Zanu PF supporters in Mbizo. Mtshena himself was not at home at the time of the fire but his family, which included a one-year-old daughter, had been severely injured and were in hospital.

That Saturday afternoon when I was in Harare, a Police Officer had called in person at my house and tipped off my wife that Zanu PF had plans to attack the house. He had learnt this from their Zanu PF Meetings. As a result of this information as well as the burning of the Chairman's House, we had to take an extra measure of precaution by ensuring that my family vacate the house at night and stay at my brother's house in Amaveni. I continued to stay at home through nights together with seven MDC youths.

On Monday, 15th May 2000, at around 1900 hours, my house, 14 R.G. Mugabe Way, New Town, was attacked by Zanu PF supporters with petrol bombs and was completely burnt out together with everything that was inside.

On the evening of the attack, my family had just left for my brother's house and I was at home with seven MDC youths. When the attack occurred, I was alone in the house, whilst the youths were out patrolling the fairly large yard. I heard an unusual but faint noise from outside so I peeped through the window to investigate. I saw a large group of people throwing missiles aimed at the windowpanes around the house. The missiles smashed through the windows and exploded inside the house causing fierce fires inside the rooms of the house. They appeared to have targeted all the windows of the seven-roomed house so that all the rooms in the house burst into flames simultaneously.

I felt as if I was in a dream. I could not believe that once again I was in for a fight for my life. I tried to wake myself up from this nightmare by pricking and scratching myself only to discover the reality of the situation. I had no doubt that this time I would meet my maker and I should prepare to die.

I gathered my wits and ran to the telephone in the corridor and was relieved to find it still working. I telephoned the police, who were only about 800 metres away, but the response was that they did not have transport and manpower. Nor would they telephone the fire brigade because they stated that their telephone could not telephone out. The police officer would not give me his name. Later on, however, it was revealed that both the Police and the Fire Brigade had been instructed not to respond quickly to any S.O.S. call until after they had been signalled. Mnangagwa, himself, was commanding the operation and Zanu PF operatives were posted at the Police Station and Fire Brigade to make sure that sympathetic Police Officers offered no help. Two hours before the attack, Retired Army Major Makombe had instructed the Police to prepare a metal coffin for the body of 'Chebundo'.

When I could not get solace from the Police, I decided I had two options i.e. either to get into the built-in wardrobe and close the doors or, to go out and die at the hands of the Zanu PF thugs. I decided to go out armed with a gas pistol and a kitchen knife. I calculated that there were between thirty to forty people with different types of weapons, metal objects, sticks and containers that might have been used to carry petrol. For some moments they were taken aback when I appeared and must have been surprised that I was still in the house. However, after their initial surprise they started their advance towards me. The air was clear and bright with the intense illumination from the bright flames. I could make out some of the faces, including two Police Officers i.e. Sergeant Chaminuka and Special Constabulary Rodger Zvasiya, who were in civilian clothes.

The attackers made no secret of who they were and when I appeared, shouted that the head that carried two million dollars had finally presented itself. Two young men were in front of the advancing group, holding large metal poles that had apparently been removed from the clothes drying line in the yard. I realised that I could not run away since the gate was locked and the yard had a high security fence on one side and a durawall on the other.

As they advanced, I became fearless and decided to die like a warrior, fighting. Up to this day, I feel I must have gone into some form of trance. I can remember shouting back at them that I was going to go down with not less than seven of them. As the two young men advanced, I used my pepper gas pistol. However, since it was in the open it was not effective. As they moved closer and one of them used the metal pole to hit me, I blocked it with my left hand and used the kitchen knife to lunge at him and stabbed him on the shoulder. He let out a mighty yell and let go of the pole, staggering backwards. I, one man on my own, charged the gang of Zanu PF thugs and again I mustered all my ancestor's voices to give out a mighty 'Warrior Cry'. This must have been too much for them as one of their leaders gave a whistle, which signalled the retreat to the cowardly group, and they ran away. I was not sure whether they were to regroup so I went for the gate to leave. Suddenly my seven MDC Youths reappeared with injuries and blood all over their bodies. They had been taken by surprise and outnumbered and sent running in different directions. We stood together helplessly looking at the burning house but ready to defend ourselves if the attackers were to return.

Some five minutes after the attackers fled about five police vehicles and the fire brigade arrived. By then the fire had engulfed the whole house as well as the carport, which was nearby, burning the car to ashes.

Later on, a number of policemen and vehicles arrived and departed. There were crowds of on lookers both on foot and in vehicles. The MDC youths tried to urge the police to take action on two well-known vehicles, used by Zanu PF for political attacks, one of them being Vehicle Number 619-212F which, were being teasingly driven around the scene by Owen 'Mudha' Ncube and a Mr Madharani. However, the police response was that action was to be taken later. Like many other cases this one never got investigated and no arrests were made despite the names and addresses of some of the attackers being supplied.

Nothing was saved from the house except the clothes that the six family occupants stood in. We lost everything that we had worked and saved for over 21 years. We lost our household furniture, children's uniforms, car and everything that we had accumulated and was close to our hearts. We felt as if the family's life had been set back by 21 years. Our house, which was on a 'rent-to-buy' Agreement with my former employer, had to be repossessed because I had breached one of the Clauses of the Agreement i.e. Engaging in Risk Activities (Politics) which had resulted in the destruction of the house. The estimated property loss including the repair work on the house, roof, windows, doors, fittings and painting was more than Z\$4 million at that time, which translates to approximately Z\$90 million as of October 2003 due to the hyperinflation of around 600%.

The following day, my family and I were faced with the stark reality of being completely homeless, having no friends or relatives and even my own employer could not shelter me in Kwekwe because I was a 'serious high risk' case. This feeling of being totally bereft and unable to fend for my family was a devastating experience. My situation felt hopeless and I shed tears of desperation. The only assistance up to this day that my new and poor Party MDC gave was a mere Z\$30 000.

The night following the attack I went to work, under the pretext of collecting something, as I had nowhere to go and I had decided to use my office as a bedroom. My wife and children spent the night at my brother's house in Amaveni. On the third day, I travelled to Kadoma, 70 kilometres to the North where, using a pseudo name, I secured three rooms for my family to lodge in. This was in the high-density suburb of Weaverly. To sound convincing to my landlord, I had to lie that I was a Trade Union Official on transfer, and that my property was to follow later on.

For over a week, I commuted to work from Kadoma. Fortunately, my workplace, Sable, was 17 kilometres from the City of Kwekwe. I would get word from my friends and fellow political activists that the search for me, by the Mnangagwa thugs, had been intensified, and it was rumoured that I had given up. They had that wrong, as if anything, I was now more determined than ever to see it through to the bitter end. I felt I had already lost half my life and I could not allow the thugs to triumph on the basis of violence. On the other hand, the people of Kwekwe started giving me some hope. Although they had been completely silenced, they kept managing to keep sending words of encouragement for me to stay in the race. I was their only last hope in the quest to have Mnangagwa dethroned from the Kwekwe Parliamentary seat. As a result, I told myself that I would not betray the people of Kwekwe; I would rather die for the just cause.

At the beginning of the second week of commuting to work from Kadoma, I held a Meeting with my bosses. We agreed that I was to go on paid leave until after the elections, both for my own safety and that of the Company. Apparently, Shingi Mutasa, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of my Company, had told the company Management to see what they could do to get rid of me. As Chairman of the Board of 'TA' Holdings, he had, during the week, flown together with Robert Mugabe to Namibia, to officially open Cresta Lodge Hotel, a new Hotel owned by his Group of Companies. On the way, Mugabe had told him that he was not happy that his (Shingi Mutasa), Company was employing a man who was challenging his close confidante, Mnangagwa. This had sent shivers down Shingi's spine hence the instruction to my bosses to get rid of me. To cover up, a letter purporting my suspension was written and sent to the Board Chairman's Office, and further on to the President's Office. Zanu PF thought I was finished, out and done. They were indeed very surprised to see me at the nomination Court in Gweru a week later.

For the remaining period before the June 24th/25th 2000 elections, Zanu PF intensified its violent campaign in Kwekwe, and the search for 'Chebundo', raiding houses of those suspected of housing me, especially my fellow church goers and known MDC supporters. They also spread their search to Gweru City following our strategy to mislead them by spreading rumours that I was now staying in Gweru. They were confused, as they would also get wind that I was seen in Kwekwe campaigning clandestinely. Using an inconspicuous vehicle with tinted windows, belonging to a Kadoma MDC activist, we would drive to Kwekwe almost on a daily basis to assess the situation. If feasible, we would meet with key, influential people to strategize and to supply and distribute campaign material to the few remaining, courageous MDC youths, under the leadership of one Sylvester 'Qoma' Majekuzi, my Election Agent, and Willard Somerai, leader of the MDC youths in the Province. This team was now operating on a 'cat-and-mouse' basis, against the combined forces of Zanu PF, the Police and the CIO.

In the remaining campaign period, more MDC houses were stoned and properties looted. Many people were injured, maimed, raped and unfortunately our Amaveni Ward Chairman, Mandishona Mutyanda, was killed. Although the election results for Kwekwe was the MDC's sweetest victory, it only helped to fuel Zanu PF and Mnangagwa's wrath. He would announce at his meetings that no matter what the cost he would not rest until he had taken revenge for the embarrassment he had suffered by his landslide defeat. He boasted of having the ill-gotten wealth to oil his violence campaign against 'Chebundo' and MDC supporters. And, indeed, he has lived up to his word to this day. The people of Kwekwe have never experience peace since then. Experiencing violence has been an on-going exercise with increased violence towards and during the election campaign for the Presidential Elections in March 2002; during MDC and ZCTU's Mass Action times; and the Local Council and Mayoral Elections of August 2003.

Many other houses were stoned, and three houses as well as the MDC Offices in Kwekwe were completely burnt down, along with two commercial farmhouses in Kwekwe East. Many Kwekwe people were displaced during these events. Unfortunately and most dishearteningly, all these properties, houses and Offices have not been repaired since 2000. They still bear testimony to Kwekwe's political violence. The MDC Party has not been able to assist, leaving the burden of pressure on me. Approaches for help from the local community has not helped as they also fear to be associated, lest Mnangagwa gets to know and will harm them and their families. This means that I have to share the little that I earn from being a Parliamentarian with the affected people.

My efforts to initiate small-scale fund raising and self-help projects for the people have been sabotaged by the Zanu PF run Local Government Council and physically vandalised by their thugs. Their strategy is to deny me democratic space to exercise my parliamentary duties and to be visible. I have remained homeless since the burning of my house. On my return from Kadoma in August 2000, and to date, no one in Kwekwe, including professional property Agencies, will allow me to lease property, as they are scared of losing their property or being targeted. I had to settle for the satellite town of Redcliff, some 15 kilometres from Kwekwe. Even in Redcliff, I have moved from house to house on six occasions as each time the landlord gets to know who I am, they became afraid or are pressured by Zanu PF to get rid of me.

The Police and the CIO continually harass me. So far, as an MP, I have experienced four police house searches, allegedly for weapons of war and other suspected subversive materials. Each time they have found no evidence. On two occasions running up to the MDC and ZCTU called Civil Actions, I was arrested and detained by police on allegations of organising Mass Actions but was released without going to Court.

In the Council and Mayoral Elections of August 2003, Mnangagwa came up with a strategy of taking advantage of the peoples' plight and poverty brought about by his Government. With the help of the self-declared Zanu PF activist, the Police District Commander, Chief Superintendent Ernest Masuka, they rounded up 5000 illegal Gold panners, a new activity in Kwekwe, which mushroomed after the Presidential Elections in 2002, due to economic hardships, and gave them rights to gold pan on condition that they become reserve militants of Zanu PF. The illegal gold panners would get registered as voters and come the voting days, after voting they would man all the roads and paths leading to Polling Stations and physically screen voters. Those voters, whose names did not appear in the Zanu PF Register, would not proceed to vote. Police were under instruction to turn a blind eye to this.

This strategy worked for Zanu PF as most people were turned away. Our Mayoral Candidate, Dr Henry Madzorera, and myself, his Election Agent, escaped death by a whisker after the car that we were driving in was stoned by a group of about 30 Zanu PF Militants as we drove off one of the polling stations on 31st August 2003. They had been annoyed by our demands for people to be allowed to vote. The car was extensively damaged but we managed to drive through receiving only minor cuts from broken glass. On the previous day, 30th August 2003, militants kept me hostage at one of the polling stations. Police's intervention was that of pleading with the militants to let me go. Despite the perpetrators being known, no arrests were made.

Finally, we decided to petition the Local Council and Mayoral Election results on the above reason, though we are fully aware of the Zanu PF loaded judicial system.

Meanwhile, Zanu PF has again intensified their violent campaign, ostensibly for the future parliamentary and presidential elections. This is to get rid of 'Chebundo' and his MDC supporters. Their strategy is to rough up the families. For instance my eldest son and daughter have been followed to their local colleges. It started with my son who had his college residential status terminated on the basis that his presence in hostels would politicise other students. Apparently, the college principal, who heads the Election Supervisory Group in Kwekwe at elections, is also an official of the Zanu PF structures. My son, therefore, has to commute on a daily basis, under risk of attack from Redcliff to the Kwekwe Polytechnic, which is a distance of 17 kilometres. He is hoping to finish the third of his four-year Business Marketing Course. My daughter, who was at the local College completing her 'A' level supplement, had to unfortunately stop attending the College on the 8th September 2003, as Zanu PF thugs would

visit the college armed with knives and threatened to burn the College down. She had to leave after the College report to police yielded no results.

In spite of the above background, difficulties and shortfalls, I want to reiterate my position and to reaffirm the spirit of the people of Kwekwe by continuing the struggle for change leading to a democratic Zimbabwe.

Blessing Chebundo,
Member of Parliament, Kwekwe

Dated: 8th October 2003