

Church of Scotland on Zimbabwe

1 July 2008

Right Rev David Lunan, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland

Zimbabwe's slow descent into chaos reached its inevitable conclusion in last Friday's sham election, and in the extraordinary spectacle of Robert Mugabe's inauguration as President after the declaration of his pyrrhic victory. His campaign of violence may have achieved its goal but - in the words of the Pan-African Parliamentary Observer Team - "the current atmosphere prevailing in the country did not give rise to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections." As Archbishop Desmond Tutu said the election was a "charade". A charade in which the people of Zimbabwe were denied the right to choose their own government. Instead they were brutalized and bullied, beaten and raped, so that Mugabe could legitimize his claim to be President.

Events of the last few days have sadly served to vindicate the decisions of the recent General Assembly when the Kirk condemned the régime's behaviour, expressing "outrage and urgent concern in regard to the extreme privation and suffering being inflicted on the people of Zimbabwe". In recent weeks we have received first hand accounts from people telling us what they have been through and how they have struggled against the rising tide of intimidation. We have heard from those being beaten up because they voted for "the wrong party", whose families had fled into the night, leaving their homes on foot to escape into the bush because the roads were being watched. Direct accounts have reached us of attacks on entire communities, of men and boys

being killed because their political views are “beyond repair”, of women and girls disappearing, “force-marched to God knows where... now they are a delicacy for the régime’s champions...”

Partner churches have kept us directly informed that they have not been spared the totalitarian onslaught of the Mugabe regime. People gathering for worship have found their routes blocked, ministers have been prevented from reaching their congregations, those seeking to worship their God have been forced instead to attend Zanu-PF rallies. Those with responsibility to care for the people have also been victimised and prevented from helping those who have been attacked. Pastors are targeted at roadblocks, church offices have been visited by the Central Intelligence Organization. Doctors are unable to offer medical attention, policemen are powerless to stop the brutality, “The order is clear enough; no interference and people shall be clobbered until they vote for the old man.”

These are not isolated stories. Our fellow Christians here in Britain have been hearing the same from their partners. Churches have been targeted, ministers and priests have been forced to seek refuge wherever they can find it. Allan Boesak, a veteran of South Africa’s anti-apartheid struggle, visited Zimbabwe and found “empty shelves in shops and the greater emptiness in the eyes of children, women and men; the sight of armed soldiers and the spontaneous anxious wondering what they are up to... in Zimbabwe food is now being used as a political tool and as barter for votes... kidnappings, torture, political killings and the destruction of whole communities because

they have campaigned and voted, you said, "for the wrong political party". The interim period towards an engineered run-off in the elections is purposefully being filled with unmitigated terror; we have seen some of the evidence, and it is frightening..."

Zimbabweans have not been silent in the face of this terror. In the weeks leading up to the election the Zimbabwean Churches spoke out, calling for help from their neighbours and from the international community, and warning that Zimbabwe faced terrible consequences if nothing was done. Hearing that warning the Assembly called on our own government to act, to work with the members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to bring about a just political settlement. Now, after the so called election, Zimbabwe needs action. The Government must redouble its efforts at the UN, and with our friends in Africa. Archbishop Tutu, and Archbishop Sentamu are right. The international community must act now to implement an effective set of sanctions aimed at Mugabe and his henchmen, and to impose an immediate arms embargo in order to protect the people of Zimbabwe.

A lasting solution can only come from within the southern African region. Even as we condemn the violence, and call on our own Government to act we recognize that Western led action or intervention will only make the situation worse. We support intervention led by Africans to solve an African problem. We call on our Government to back African involvement, even if that includes direct intervention. That is why we called on the Government to work with SADC, and that is why I wrote last week to frontline heads of state where we

have longstanding partners. Just as in years past a passion for justice has united southern Africans to bring down the racist Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland and the apartheid regime in South Africa, so today we look to the leaders and people of southern Africa to bring an end to the monstrous oppression being endured by the people of Zimbabwe. Churches have a key role to play and the Church of Scotland will be represented later this month at a summit meeting which has been called by our partner churches in the region. So far as we are concerned, we will not rest until a better day has dawned for Zimbabwe.

Here in the UK we have been witness to the calm dignity and determination of the Zimbabwean people. We have listened to them and heard of the lives they have to live. We recall the sound of their voice when they spoke in the first round of voting in March. They hoped that there would be a change for the better, now it seems that those hopes have been dashed. But we cannot simply ignore their plight, or choose to be silent. We believe that action can be taken which will restore the hope of the people of Zimbabwe.

Responsibility for that action lies with all of us, with people of good will here in the UK, and in the West, and especially with Zimbabwe's neighbours in Africa. As we remember their dignity and courage our prayers are with them.