

ZIMBABWE: Political violence escalates

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Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and President Robert Mugabe have been unhappy partners in the Government of National Unity
HARARE, 14 February 2011 (IRIN) - Zimbabwe's Government of National Unity (GNU) was born out of political violence in 2008, and analysts see its demise occurring in much the same way.

The two-year-old unity government was formed on 11 February, 2009 after two rounds of violent and disputed elections the year before. It "was more like a ceasefire agreement between belligerent forces and very little has been achieved under that set-up," said Philip Pasirayi, spokesman for the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, a grouping of civic organizations.

Although no election has been announced, both President Robert Mugabe, leader of ZANU-PF, and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), have created an air of expectation that a national poll is being planned for 2011.

"As expected, following Mugabe's call for elections in 2011, the violence perpetrated by hired ZANU-PF hoodlums has escalated in the past three weeks. This is not at all a result of political protest by Mugabe's personal party - rather, this is well-orchestrated destabilization of the GNU... This will throw the nation back to the year 2008," political analyst John Makumbe alleged in an article published on 9 February.

"The party [MDC] wants elections, but there has to be an atmosphere existing for free and fair elections... There has to be security of the person. We are saying 'Yes' to elections, but 'No' to a bloodbath," Tendai Biti, Zimbabwe's Finance Minister and also the MDC secretary-general, recently told an international news agency.

Mugabe, who has been in power since independence from Britain in 1980, extended his tenure after Tsvangirai withdrew from the second round of the presidential vote in protest against political violence, but ZANU-PF lost its parliamentary majority in 2008 for the first time since independence.

Pasirayi told IRIN that concerns over an election in 2011 had caused the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition to lobby the recent African Union summit in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa.

They had approached the African Commission, one of the guarantors of the unity government, as well as the regional body, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), "to impress upon them that Zimbabwe is not ready for elections until a lot of reforms have been put in place."

Lack of reform

"The few [reforms] that have been put in place, like the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), have not been adequately resourced to run a free, fair and credible election. ZEC has said it needs money to come up with a clean voters' roll but the politicians are insisting on fresh elections," Pasirayi said.

"Our demands... are [also] that when the environment for democratic elections is in place, then they should be supervised by SADC and the African Union," he said.

A report published in January 2011 by the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), an independent monitoring organization, found that nearly one-third of the people listed on the voters' role were deceased.

The unity government was expected to draft a new constitution and institute media and security reforms so that a free and fair election could be held, but none of these tasks has been accomplished. A number of issues remain unresolved and appear to be intractable. In 2002 the EU and the US imposed targeted sanctions, including travel bans and freezing bank accounts, on ZANU-PF leaders and companies linked to Mugabe for alleged human rights violations.

Political analyst Gabriel Chaibva told IRIN that the MDC were "undermining" the unity government process because they had failed to persuade the European Union (EU) and US to lift sanctions against the ZANU-PF leadership.

The MDC has claimed that the appointments of Reserve Bank governor Gideon Gono, and attorney-general

Johannes Tomana, were made unilaterally by Mugabe and were in breach of the GPA agreement.

In 2000 Mugabe launched the fast-track land reform programme, which redistributed more than 4,000 white commercial farms to landless black Zimbabweans and sent the economy into a downward spiral.

In the first quarter of 2009 nearly seven million Zimbabweans relied on emergency food aid, and in 2011 donor agencies estimated that about 1.7 million people would require food assistance.

Successes

Nevertheless, there have been some successes during the unity government's two years in power, most notably abandoning the Zimbabwe dollar and introducing a multiple currency system using US dollars, South African rands, and Botswana pula, which put an end to hyperinflation.

In December 2008 Steve Hanke, professor of applied economics at Johns Hopkins University, in the US, and senior fellow of the Cato Institute, a Washington-based think-tank, estimated Zimbabwe's annual inflation rate at around 6.5 quindicillion novemdecillion percent - 65 followed by 107 zeros.

Education and schooling have been placed on a more even keel again, and health infrastructure has improved, but Pasirayi tempered the belief that all was well in these sectors.

"Even on the economic front, little has been achieved, with the bulk of the civil service earning around US\$200 per month when an average family requires US\$500 to meet its basic requirements," he noted.

"A large portion of the population is going without electricity, while local authorities are providing poor services to Zimbabweans."

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