



International Liaison Dialogue and Research

Southern African Liaison Office



15 September 2020

Written by Fowzia Davids and Lwazi Somya

In a meeting that sat between the 28th – 30th of August 2020, the African National Congress (ANC) National Executive Committee (NEC) amongst other things, deliberated on the situation in Zimbabwe. In their statement, the ANC NEC welcomed the South African government's efforts to engage in the situation in Zimbabwe, especially noting the deployment of the special envoys to Zimbabwe.¹ They emphasised the importance of the envoys meeting all parties and relevant stakeholders in the country, and intended to do so during their visit.² The ANC NEC further emphasised the need for the party process to be complementary to the government process, while fostering greater party-to-party interaction in order to understand how the ANC and the South African Government may assist the people of Zimbabwe.³

In line with the resolutions of this meeting, the ANC deployed a delegation of 10, led by Secretary-General Ace Magashule, to meet with the leadership of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), and arrived in Zimbabwe on the 8th of September 2020.⁴ This paper is a situation brief on Zimbabwe, intending to provide better contextual understanding as how the ANC NEC derived its resolution on Zimbabwe.

On Friday 24th of July 2020, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released a statement through their spokesperson, Liz Throssell, advising the Zimbabwean Government against using the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext to clamp down on human rights.⁵

The OHCHR statement followed the 20th of July arrest of prominent journalist Hopewell Chin'ono and leader of the Transform Zimbabwe movement, Jacob Ngarivhume- an organiser of the planned 31st of July anti-corruption protests in Zimbabwe. Both Chin'ono and Ngarivhume are charged with "incitement to participate in public violence".⁶

Further, the OHCHR raised concerns over the excessive use of force by security personnel to disperse and arrest participants of recent protests who were arrested for violating lockdown restrictions. Throssell advised Zimbabwean authorities to implement lockdown measures that are proportionate and humanely enforced, without the use of excessive force. The arrests have drawn the attention of the international community as there are concerns of a clampdown against opponents of the government and journalists, particularly those raising allegations of corruption and mismanagement.

More recently on the 28th of August 2020, a coalition of international heads of missions in Zimbabwe issued a warning to the Government with similar concerns:

"But COVID-19 must not be used as an excuse to restrict citizens' fundamental freedoms. Freedom of the press, of opinion, and of assembly are all universally recognised human rights and are guaranteed by the Zimbabwean Constitution. The government also has a responsibility to investigate and prosecute those responsible for violating human rights."

The Zimbabwean government, in a statement released on the 25th of July 2020, has pushed back against these allegations, as they have stated that, "The arrest of these two individuals clearly has nothing to do with their anti-corruption stance which finds convergence with President Mnangagwa's position but their ploy to violently destabilise the country and unconstitutionally seize power (by any means necessary) putting Zimbabwean lives and property at

¹ ANC, 2020. ANC NEC Meeting of 28-30 August 2020 Statement.

<https://twitter.com/MYANC/status/1300475859283910658/photo/2> [6 September 2020]

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ndlovu, R. 2020. South Africa's Ruling ANC Heads To Zimbabwe For Talks <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-09-06/s-africa-s-ruling-anc-heads-to-zimbabwe-for-talks-on-tuesday> [7 September 2020]

⁵ AFP, 2020. UN warns Zimbabwe against using pandemic for clampdown <https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/un-warns-zimbabwe-against-using-pandemic-for-clampdown-20200724>

⁶ Al Jazeera, 2020. Zimbabwe police detain prominent journalist, opposition official. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/07/zimbabwe-police-detain-prominent-journalist-protest-leader-200720193232172.html>

risk”.⁷ Similarly, the ZANU-PF spokesperson dismissed the 28th of August statement, while official government representatives refused to comment.

The 31st of July 2020 saw the arrest of 60 people, including prominent author Tsitsi Dangarembga on charges of incitement of violence and breaching COVID-19 health and safety regulations, and Movement of Democratic Change (MDC) Spokesperson Fadzayi Mahere, under similar charges. Both have been subsequently released on bail.⁸ Moreover, authorities have continued with arbitrary arrests of activists and opposition politicians, including the MDC Deputy Chairperson, Job Sikhala on the 22nd of August 2020. Sikhala has since made bail and awaits his trial on charges of inciting public violence.

As Hopewell Chin’ono remained imprisoned, pressure mounted from the international community to ensure the protection of human rights. The Spokesperson to the Secretary-General of the United Nations stated that, The Secretary-General has been following with concern recent developments in Zimbabwe. He urges the Government of Zimbabwe to ensure the protection of all fundamental human rights, notably the freedom of opinion and expression and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, in accordance with Zimbabwe’s human rights obligations. He also calls on all political actors and civil society to resolve issues peacefully through inclusive dialogue.⁹

On the 6th of August 2020, President Ramaphosa deployed a special envoy to Zimbabwe consisting of Former Speaker of South Africa’s National Assembly and Former Deputy President Ms Baleka Mbete, and South Africa’s Former Minister of Safety and Security Dr. Sydney Mufamadi to engage with the Zimbabwean government and various stakeholders to identify possible ways South Africa could assist the people of Zimbabwe.¹⁰

The deployment of this envoy has been lauded by the international community, including by the African Union Commission, with Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat, encouraging the Zimbabwean authorities to uphold the rule of law and protect human rights. In the statement, Moussa Faki Mahamat welcomed the deployment of the special envoy by President Cyril Ramaphosa and reaffirmed the African Union’s commitment to support the government and people of Zimbabwe to deepen Zimbabwe’s democracy.¹¹ Further, reports in early September confirmed that President Ramaphosa will be sending a second envoy to Zimbabwe to address the ongoing crisis in the country. The previous envoy yielded limited results and the process was criticised for failing to confront Zimbabwean president Emmerson Mnangagwa on his administration’s repression of state critics. The Zimbabwean opposition was also reportedly barred from attending meetings with the envoy; however, the second envoy is set to meet opposition groups and civil society.¹²

In March 2020, the International Monetary Fund Article IV consultation with the Zimbabwean government concluded by raising concerns about the Zimbabwean economy, by noting that,

“... there is concern that Zimbabwe is facing an economic and humanitarian crisis exacerbated by policy missteps and climate-related shocks. These would require difficult policy choices from the authorities and support from the international community. Directors urged the authorities to make a concerted effort to ensure economic and social stability through the adoption of coordinated fiscal, monetary and foreign exchange policies, alongside with efforts to address food insecurity and serious governance challenges.

⁷ Ministry of Information Publicity and Broadcasting Services, 2020. *Press Release: The Arrest of Messrs Hopewell Chin’ono and Jacob Ngarivhume. (in possession of author)*

⁸ Human Rights Watch, 2020. Zimbabwe: SADC, AU Should Denounce Crackdown.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/06/zimbabwe-sadc-au-should-denounce-crackdown>

⁹ United Nations, 2020. Daily Press Brief by the Office of the Spokesperson of the Secretary General.

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/db200805.doc.htm> [5 August 2020]

¹⁰ Presidency of RSA, 2020. President appoints Special Envoys to Zimbabwe. <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/press-statements/president-appoints-special-envoys-zimbabwe>

¹¹ AUC, 2020. AUC Chairperson urges authorities in Zimbabwe to uphold the rule of law and protect Human Rights.

<https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20200807/auc-chairperson-urges-authorities-zimbabwe-uphold-rule-law-and-protect-human> [10 August 2020]

¹² eNCA, 2020. SA to send new envoys to crisis-hit Zimbabwe. 1 September. URL: <https://www.enca.com/news/sa-send-new-envoys-crisis-hit-zimbabwe> [6 September 2020].

They emphasized the importance of reengagement with the international community to support efforts to achieve economic sustainability and address the humanitarian crisis.”¹³

On the 10th of August 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa’s special envoy to Zimbabwe met with President Emmerson Mnangagwa with the intention of also meeting with members of the opposition and civil society organisations in order to resolve the concerns raised. However, the envoy was not granted the opportunity to meet members of the opposition and members of Zimbabwean civil society, and returned home following the meeting with the President.

On the 21st of August 2020, the ANC’s Chairperson of the International Relations Sub-Committee Lindiwe Zulu in a webinar hosted by the Brenthurst Foundation acknowledged on behalf of the ANC that there was a crisis in Zimbabwe.¹⁴ She committed the ANC to further engaging ZANU-PF and other relevant stakeholders on the ongoing situation.

On the 2nd of September 2020, after 44 days of incarceration, Zimbabwean journalist Hopewell Chin’ono was released from pre-trial detention after being granted \$10 000 bail.¹⁵ Angela Quintal from the Committee To Protect Journalists said that,

“We welcome today’s long-overdue release of journalist Hopewell Chin’ono, but authorities must immediately drop the vindictive and meritless charges against him and let him live and work freely... Chin’ono’s pre-trial detention in the infamous Chikurubi Maximum Security prison has risked his life during a global pandemic and turned him into a poster child of Zimbabwe’s anti-corruption and good governance movement.”¹⁶

Opposition activist, Jacob Ngarivhume, was also released under strict conditions, but on \$50 000 bail, on the same day as Chin’ono, with the judge ruling that the state had failed to produce evidence in support of the state’s opposition to his release.¹⁷

These events unfolded in the context of deteriorating economic conditions both domestically and internationally, with little means of planned economic recovery as global demand for Zimbabwean goods and services remains low due to COVID-19 lockdowns being implemented throughout the world. Social unrest in the country has increased amid a protracted economic crisis marked by hyperinflation, significant depreciation of the Zimbabwean Dollar against the United States Dollar, and widespread food and medical equipment shortages have presented a systemic challenge to Zimbabwe.

¹³ IMF. 2020. *IMF Executive Board Concludes 2020 Article IV Consultation with Zimbabwe*.

<https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/02/26/pr2072-zimbabwe-imf-executive-board-concludes-2020-article-iv-consultation>

¹⁴ The Brenthurst Foundation, 2020. <https://www.thebrenthurstfoundation.org/events/watch-the-webinar-lindiwe-zulu-and-tendai-biti-on-fixing-zimbabwe/> [6 September 2020]

¹⁵ CJP, 2020. Journalist Hopewell Chin’ono released on bail, with restrictions, in Zimbabwe. <https://cpj.org/2020/09/journalist-hopewell-chinono-released-on-bail-with-restrictions-in-zimbabwe/> [6 September 2020]

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, 2020. ZIM JUDGES END CHIN’ONO AND NGARIVHUME’S MONTH-LONG INCARCERATION, IMPOSES ONEROUS BAIL CONDITIONS. <https://news.pindula.co.zw/2020/09/03/full-text-human-rights-lawyers-statement-chinono-ngarivhumes-release-from-prison/> [6 September 2020]

About the Southern African Liaison Office:



The Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) is a South African-based not-for-profit civil society organisation which, through advocacy, dialogue, policy consensus and in-depth research and analysis, influences the current thinking and debates on foreign policy especially regarding African crises and conflicts.

SALO would like to thank Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) for their direct support for this Publication



Norwegian People's Aid

The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of SALO, and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the donors who provided financial assistance.