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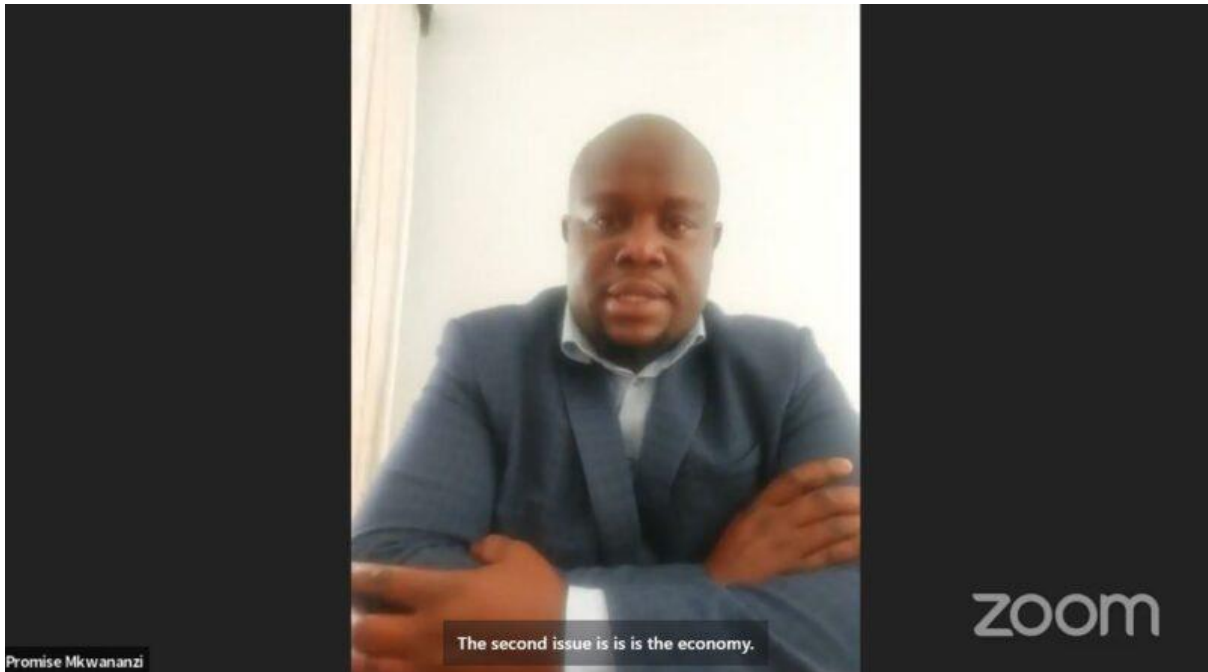
Policy Brief

16 May 2024

Zoom Online Platform

Zimbabwe's 44th Year of Independence: Political Parties Reflection

By Ineke Stemmet, SALO



Executive Summary

On 16 May 2024, the Southern African Liaison Office, in partnership with the Norwegian Embassy, hosted a dialogue with Zimbabwean political parties reflecting on Zimbabwe's 44th year of independence. The purpose of the dialogue was to discuss:

- The Promise: A reflection on the progress and the promise of independence.
- The Reality: Where Zimbabwe is today as the country turns 44, and how democracy has developed.
- The Future: A reflection on a vision of the future to realise the promise and the ideals of liberation and a vision for building a better post-independence Zimbabwe.

Speakers to the dialogue included Promise Mkwanzani, Citizens Coalition for Change Spokesperson; Dr Tadini Masaya, United Zimbabwe Alliance Spokesperson; and Mthulisi Hanana, Secretary-General of ZAPU, with respondents including Peter Mutasa, Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition Chairperson, and Sitabile Dewa, Director at Women's Academy for Leadership and Political Excellence.

Context/Importance of the Problem

Zimbabwe gained independence from British colonial rule on April 18, 1980. However, a worrying trend has been evident in the last 44 years – the closing of civic space in Zimbabwe. The rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly are under constant threat, with members and supporters of the main opposition party facing continuous violent attacks at political rallies.¹ This was made even more evident in August 2023 when Zimbabwe held its elections. The election period was marred with irregularities such as voting delays, issues with the voter roll, bans on opposition rallies and biased state media coverage. Most international observers condemned the election as not being free nor fair, with the European Observer Mission stating that it was marred by a "culture of fear".² The dialogue reflected on these developments as well as the trajectory of the country as a whole.

Reflecting on the promise of independence

Promise Mkwanzani began his input by reflecting on the liberation struggle. He characterised the struggle by highlighting three fundamental reasons that drove it. Firstly, the struggle was fundamentally about the land imbalance in Zimbabwe, an issue that later gained international attention. Secondly, the fight for majority rule, encapsulated in the principle of "one man, one vote", was crucial. Lastly, the struggle

¹ Amnesty International. 2023. *Zimbabwe: 43 years independence commemoration marred by rapidly shrinking civic space and decline in freedoms*. 18 April. Available: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/04/zimbabwe-43-years-independence-commemoration-marred-by-rapidly-shrinking-civic-space/> [24 July 2024].

² Al Jazeera. 2023. *Zimbabwe's President Mnangagwa wins second term, opposition rejects result*. 27 August. Available: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/27/zimbabwes-president-mnangagwa-wins-second-term-opposition-rejects-result> [24 July 2024].

focused on the economy, specifically the equitable distribution of natural resources and other resources available in the country. Dr Masaya added to this:

*“We say that Zimbabweans went to war to fight for their land back. But, what that land issue best captures is the issue of economic emancipation and the fair distribution of the means of production. That is essentially what people were fighting for. So, it is not just the land, it is the ability to hold and use anything else that can be used for production”.*³

According to Dr Masaya, the second and more critical aspect of the struggle was against legitimised racism, legalised segregation, and constitutionally sanctioned oppression. This struggle resonated with global movements, such as the civil rights movement and other oppressed nations fighting for similar recognition and rights.

The reality of independence in Zimbabwe

Promise Mkwanzani addressed the second question by emphasising the continuing issue of land distribution in Zimbabwe. He rated the country's progress on equitable land distribution as less than three out of ten. The Fast Track Land Reform Programme of 2000 failed to achieve its intended result of equitable land distribution, instead transferring land from former white colonial owners to the ruling black elite.

Regarding the economy, Mkwanzani noted that the promise of economic emancipation at independence in 1980 has not been fulfilled. He believes that the standard of living has declined since then, with access to the economy, employment, and means of production remaining limited to a few elites. This situation has been exacerbated by corruption and looting by the elite, leading to the rise of the informal economy as people seek alternative means of survival despite Zimbabwe's vast natural resources. On the question of majority rule, Mkwanzani expressed disappointment, noting that the principle of "one man, one vote" has been undermined.

Despite this bleak picture, Dr Masaya believes that some achievements are worth celebrating. The fact that an oppressed group could organise and assert that their suffering was unjust, to the extent that they were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice and give their lives, should be acknowledged as a significant victory:

*“For instance, we were able to quash the dream of Ian Smith of recreating an apartheid system in Zimbabwe. That was crushed in its infancy. We were able to crush the façade of Muzorewa and Ian Smith in their supposed new system, which once again was a façade and an imitation. We were also able to unshackle, to an extent, the yokes of interior and colonial rule”.*⁴

Mthulisi Hanana added to the reality of independence in Zimbabwe by highlighting the unfortunate state of the country's elections. He noted that there has never been an election in Zimbabwe that was not marred by violence or disputed in some form.

³ Masaya, T. 2024. Zimbabwe's 44th Year of Independence: Political Parties Reflection. *Southern African Liaison Office*. 15 June. Available: <https://www.salo.org.za/zimbabwe-at-its-44th-year-of-independence-political-parties-reflection-16-may-2024/> [24 July 2024].

⁴ Ibid.

Referring to the most recent election and the subsequent recalls, Hanana suggested that the infiltration of the opposition ranks and potential efforts by ZANU-PF to secure a two-thirds majority indicate that something has gone wrong. Furthermore, he added:

*“We find ourselves not the breadbasket of Africa, but we are now the beggars in Africa. Now we are faced with drought, as we have in many other years where we have the United Nations and other organisations coming in to feed our people, which is a sure sign that as a country we have failed to deliver the promise that we had when we came from the war”.*⁵

Sitabile Dewa emphasised the gender disparities in Zimbabwe. The issues of access to economic opportunities reveal significant gender disparities. Women are notably lagging behind in accessing arable and productive land, with most being relegated to small-scale farming. This type of land is often non-bankable, exacerbating their vulnerability, especially during the current El Niño-induced drought. The government has not made substantial efforts to ensure equitable land distribution among genders. In addition to land access, there is a rush for mining opportunities, which primarily benefits men. A gender analysis shows that men predominantly access mining rights and engage in illicit financial activities, such as smuggling gold and diamonds out of the country. These practices undermine the economic prospects of Zimbabwe. She continued:

*“I also want to touch on the fight for majority rule, which was one of the reasons why our parents fought the liberation struggle. Majority rule also means a 50/50 gender balance in key leadership positions. But sadly, if the 2023 election statistics are anything to go by, we saw the number of women elected to leadership actually decreasing instead of increasing... Sadly, last year, we saw only 10% of women elected as MPs and only 12 women elected as councillors. Women are being relegated to useless quotas where they do not have power, where they are being subjected to victimisation and name-calling, and where they do not have access to community development funds or funds to develop their constituencies”.*⁶

What the future holds

Promise Mkwanzani concluded that the opposition is always available to meet, discuss, and collaborate not only with other opposition political parties but also with civil society and other progressive forces in the country. He stressed the necessity of dialogue in Zimbabwe, noting that the platform for this dialogue must be agreed upon by all parties, including ZANU-PF. Despite being the source of the problem, ZANU-PF must also be part of the solution. Mthulisi Hanana:

⁵ Hanana, M. 2024. Zimbabwe's 44th Year of Independence: Political Parties Reflection. *Southern African Liaison Office*. 15 June. Available: <https://www.salo.org.za/zimbabwe-at-its-44th-year-of-independence-political-parties-reflection-16-may-2024/> [24 July 2024].

⁶ Dewa, S. 2024. Zimbabwe's 44th Year of Independence: Political Parties Reflection. *Southern African Liaison Office*. 15 June. Available: <https://www.salo.org.za/zimbabwe-at-its-44th-year-of-independence-political-parties-reflection-16-may-2024/> [24 July 2024].

*“So, one of the things that we have seen as a party is that elections have failed to express the will of the people. So, if elections fail to deliver the will of our people, we must as a nation come together and say to ourselves, how do we deliver freedom for people because the ballot has failed to do that? These are ongoing conversations that we must have within the opposition rank, and also with other stakeholders in the country”.*⁷

Mthulisi Hanana emphasised the urgency of addressing the immediate needs of the people, stating that they must not be allowed to starve while waiting for the next election in 2028. He warned that if ZANU-PF continues its current governance, characterised by looting gold and other resources, the country may not survive until 2028, leading to the loss of more lives. He also called for the opposition to leverage its numbers and for leadership that will rise, take the initiative, and lead from the front. Sitabile Dewa concluded:

*“Going into the future, as the women's movement, we are just hoping that the government and all relevant stakeholders will be able to respect the tenets of the Constitution, property rights, the rule of law, and the sanctity of life. No one should be arrested, beaten, or killed for choosing a political party. No one should be beaten or forced to leave the country to become an economic refugee because the government is failing to provide. So, going forward, this period of 44 years of independence gives us an opportunity to reflect on where we have done good, where we are not doing well, and areas that need immediate attention”.*⁸

The Region and International Community

To illustrate the regression in the right to choose leaders in Zimbabwe, Promise Mkwanzani highlighted the recently conducted harmonised elections of August 2023. For the first time, regional and continental bodies such as SADC, the African Union, and others in the observation mission admitted that the electoral conditions in Zimbabwe were not conducive to a free and fair election. Additionally, the regime in Zimbabwe has attempted to decimate the opposition, the Citizens Coalition for Change led by advocate Nelson Chamisa. This is evidenced by the illegal and unlawful recalls of Members of Parliament and councillors who were elected in that election:

“I want to say that historically, no liberation has been achieved without the support and assistance of neighbours of the continent and the international community. As Zimbabwe moves to try and restore that promise of independence and the liberation struggle, we call upon the international community, regional partners and leaders, and the African continent to help us

⁷ Hanana, M. 2024. Zimbabwe's 44th Year of Independence: Political Parties Reflection. *Southern African Liaison Office*. 15 June. Available: <https://www.salo.org.za/zimbabwe-at-its-44th-year-of-independence-political-parties-reflection-16-may-2024/> [24 July 2024].

⁸ Dewa, S. 2024. Zimbabwe's 44th Year of Independence: Political Parties Reflection. *Southern African Liaison Office*. 15 June. Available: <https://www.salo.org.za/zimbabwe-at-its-44th-year-of-independence-political-parties-reflection-16-may-2024/> [24 July 2024].

achieve these realities. These are not just important for Zimbabwe; a prosperous, stable, and peaceful Zimbabwe is good for the region and the international community”.⁹

Comments and Questions:

Brian Raftopoulos: *“What I have not heard enough of, and what I think we really need to do now, is that the opposition politics needs internal introspection. There needs to be a critical look at what has happened to the opposition. Not only the repressive politics of ZANU-PF which is clear, but the strategic mistakes that have been made by the opposition. Not just the recent ones but beginning from the Tsvangirai period...One also needs to look at how ZANU-PF builds these constituencies, and how they are able to maintain the rule, not only through repression and violence but also through forming their constituencies. Therefore, this needs to look at the narratives that the opposition uses in fighting against this repressive regime. They also need to understand regional politics, which has often escaped the narratives of the opposition, and global politics. I have not heard anything from the opposition, for example, on the genocidal activities of Israel in Gaza”.*

Ngqabutho Mabhena (African Diaspora Forum): *“Our liberation is not complete. What is required is for us to complete our liberation. What we have placed on record is that part of completing the liberation is to build a national democratic economy. This requires us to hold a national dialogue”.*

Safoora Sadek (ANC): *“While listening to the contributions, I was very struck by the similarities between the 44 years of independence and the 30 years of democracy in South Africa. I think particularly from a political party perspective, obviously, the history is important. I think the one thing we are struggling with and have not openly discussed in the ANC is how you make the shift from being a liberation movement to being a political party once you are in power, once you have achieved what we call independence...The mistake we made is that we have been accused, including by our own alliance partners, of having abandoned the second stage of what economic equality looks like, what it means, and what changes need to be made. So, I think, for me two issues are when in Zimbabwe does a liberation movement move from being a liberation movement to a political party? The second is what are those stages that one would need to go through to say we have achieved this stage”.*

Policy Critiques and Policy Recommendations

- The Fast Track Land Reform Programme of 2000 failed to achieve equitable land distribution, instead benefiting the ruling elite. The broader economic policies have led to the destruction of Zimbabwe's economy, including hyperinflation and the erosion of public savings.

⁹ Mkwanzani, P. 2024. Zimbabwe's 44th Year of Independence: Political Parties Reflection. *Southern African Liaison Office*. 15 June. Available: <https://www.salo.org.za/zimbabwe-at-its-44th-year-of-independence-political-parties-reflection-16-may-2024/> [24 July 2024].

- Women and marginalised groups continue to face significant barriers to political participation and economic opportunities, with current policies and practices failing to promote gender equality and inclusion effectively.
- Zimbabwe's elections have consistently been marred by violence and disputes, undermining democratic processes. The most recent elections have continued this trend, with claims of voter manipulation, recalls of elected MPs, and an overall lack of free and fair electoral conditions.
- Comprehensive electoral reforms need to be implemented to ensure free and fair elections, including independent oversight of electoral processes, transparent voter registration, and the elimination of political violence.
- A national dialogue needs to be initiated that includes all political parties, civil society, and other stakeholders to build consensus on national priorities and foster a collaborative approach to governance and development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the dialogue provided a comprehensive platform for critical analysis and discussion on the nation's progress, current challenges, and future prospects. The reflections highlighted the enduring issues stemming from the liberation struggle, such as land distribution, economic inequality, and the fight for majority rule, while also recognising the achievements and progress made in certain areas.

The discussions underscored the significant setbacks in Zimbabwe's journey towards fulfilling the promise of independence, including persistent political violence, economic mismanagement, and gender disparities. The speakers emphasised the necessity for comprehensive electoral reforms, equitable economic policies, and genuine national dialogue to address these issues effectively. The call for an inclusive approach, involving all political parties, civil society, and international partners, resonated as a crucial step towards rebuilding a democratic, prosperous, and stable Zimbabwe.

Looking ahead, the emphasis on dialogue, consensus-building, and strategic collaboration among stakeholders offers a hopeful path towards realising the ideals of the liberation struggle. Zimbabwe must continue to engage in introspection and reform, leveraging the lessons from its past to shape a better future for all its citizens. The support and involvement of regional and international communities remain vital in this endeavour, ensuring that Zimbabwe's journey towards true independence and democracy is both supported and sustained.

The analysis and recommendations included in this report do not necessarily reflect the view of SALO or any of the donors or conference participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. The contents of the report are the sole responsibility of SALO and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the donors who provided financial assistance for this policy dialogue session.

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.

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