

Statement by the Zimbabwe Crisis Committee on the occasion of the Meeting of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group

The Zimbabwe Crisis Committee (CCZ) represents 250 Zimbabwean civil society organizations, and derives its mandate from the 4 August 2001 Crisis in Zimbabwe Conference.

The Crisis Committee notes that the Commonwealth Harare Declaration specifically invites civil society organizations within the Commonwealth to be involved in the process of implementing the broad objectives agreed to therein by the State Parties. The Crisis Committee believes that the views of civil society in Zimbabwe should constitute an essential component of the current dialogue between the Commonwealth and the Zimbabwe Government under the auspices of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG).

The Crisis Committee fully endorses the principles set out in clauses 4 and 9 of the Harare Declaration and therefore calls on CMAG to treat Zimbabwe as a "case of special urgency".

The Committee believes that there is overwhelming credible evidence that the Zimbabwe Government has systematically violated and continues to violate the fundamental principles underlying the Harare Declaration. It recalls the previous concerns expressed by the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) regarding the situation in Zimbabwe.

The Crisis Committee believes that there has been no credible attempt by the Zimbabwe Government since the signing of the Abuja Agreement to address the concerns regarding violations of the of the Harare Declaration, save for public undertakings not supported by actions on the ground. Furthermore, there has been no credible attempt by the Zimbabwe Government to consult civil society or meet with civil society according to the requests of civil society as envisaged by the Declaration.

The Zimbabwe government has failed to fulfil its obligations to "respect human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law", and this dereliction is so serious as to indicate a "case of special urgency". The evidence clearly establishes serious and flagrant violation of all the essential elements of the Declaration. Over the last few weeks the situation has deteriorated further with the deployment of militant youths around the country to engage in violent intimidation on behalf of ZANU (PF). This and the continued attempt to force through draconian legislation to stifle the independent press, to stop dissent and civic protest and to impose additional unreasonable restrictions into the electoral process is a clear indication that the Zimbabwean Government is bent upon full scale repression.

Since March 2000, there have been 350,000 cases of human rights violations, which include abduction, torture, rape and murder. There are

currently 21,000 people internally displaced by political violence in the rural areas. Most tragically 125 people have been killed in incidents of politically related violence.

Recommendations to CMAG

The Crisis Committee therefore submits that the Zimbabwe case requires urgent and immediate action on the part of the Zimbabwe Government and the Commonwealth.

The Crisis Committee recommends that in terms of the Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme on the Harare Declaration, the Government of Zimbabwe be required to undertake specific actions in order to comply with the Declaration. Such actions include but are not restricted to the following:

- The immediate return to respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law, including:
- The immediate cessation of all organised violence and torture;
- The immediate disbanding of all militia and in particular youth militia;
- The application of the rule of law without political favour;
- The restoration of non-partisan enforcement of the law by the police;
- The repeal or withdrawal of all draconian legislation, including the Public Order and Security Act, the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Bill, and the "Harmonised" Labour Bill.
- The establishment of an independent electoral commission;
- The acceptance that civil society organisations can carry out voter education as well as monitoring/observing the campaign and polling process in the forthcoming Presidential election;
- The conduct of the Presidential Election under a common roll instead of under a system of constituency based voting;
- The provision of postal voting for all Zimbabwean citizens outside the country;
- The acceptance of the principle that Zimbabwean citizens currently resident outside the country can return home to vote
- The barring of the use by the President of the sweeping powers granted to him under section 158 of the Electoral Act to interfere with the electoral process.

In relation to the forthcoming Presidential elections, the Crisis Committee recommends that the Zimbabwe Government adhere to the election standards adopted by the SADC Parliamentary Forum in March 2001.

The Zimbabwe Government must undertake to allow the observation of the upcoming elections in March 2002 by representatives of other countries, regional and international bodies and local and international civic organisations and that such observers should be permitted to commence their observation immediately should they wish to do so.

In order to establish whether these measures have been implemented, it is necessary for there to be an effective monitoring system based in Zimbabwe. The Crisis Committee recommends the immediate establishment of a monitoring Commission to carry out the function of verification. This could consist of representatives from the Commonwealth, SADC, the United Nations, and representatives of the Zimbabwe Government, political parties, Churches and civil society. This Commission should have power to investigate and report without restriction or hindrance.

In the event of non-compliance by the Zimbabwe Government, the Crisis Committee considers that the Commonwealth should immediately and publicly censure the Zimbabwean government and immediately or within a reasonable period of time before the election, undertake appropriate actions according to the Millbrook Action Programme on the Harare Declaration.

The Crisis Committee wishes to emphasise that the ordinary citizens of Zimbabwe are the victims of the current crisis and not the perpetrators, and that any punitive actions should be targeted at those responsible for the Zimbabwe crisis and not at ordinary Zimbabweans.

Brian Raftopolous
Chairperson, Zimbabwe Crisis Committee
29 January 2002

The Zimbabwe Crisis Committee

The Crisis Committee is the foremost civil society coalition in Zimbabwe bringing together about 250 Zimbabwean civil society organisations (including human rights groups, trade unions, lawyers, academics, women's groups, youth groups). It was set up in August 2001 to provide a co-ordinated response to the current political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe.

In light of recent developments including the statement by the defence forces, the raft of repressive legislation and the escalating violence, civil society groups in Zimbabwe are seeking urgent regional and international support. Representatives of Crisis are planning delegations to several Southern African countries.

In addition, this current delegation is visiting Brussels and London to coincide with key meetings like the EU General Affairs Council in Brussels on 28th January and the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group in London on 30th January. In London, the delegation is meeting the Foreign Office, Commonwealth Secretariat and DFID. They will also brief MPs and the media as well as hold discussions with civil society groups.

Members of the visiting delegation

Brian Raftopolous, Chair of Crisis & leading academic on issues of civil society
Lydia Zigomo, Director of Women Lawyers Association
Collen Gwiyo, Deputy General Secretary of Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions
Perpetua Bganya, Co-ordinator of National Constitutional Assembly
Brian Kagoro, Co-ordinator of Crisis

30 January 2002