

## Predisposing the Scourge of Political Violence

09 August 2017

Political violence in Zimbabwe has always been a cause for concern. It curses our society. Very little effort or headway has been made to address this historical problem. Because violence has deep roots in our society, it requires “a holistic and concerted approach to address it”.<sup>1</sup> Politically motivated violence needs to be understood as something unacceptable and awful. It is an unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property in order to coerce or intimidate a government or the civilian population in furtherance of political or social objectives.<sup>2</sup> Therefore violence of whatever form or magnitude must not be a signature of any society. It cannot be something to look back in history and be proud of, but to be ashamed. For instance, Zimbabwean pre-colonial era was characteristically violent, the colonial conquest was terrible and liberation struggle bloody.<sup>3</sup> In the post colonial independent Zimbabwe, the cases of violence were supposed to be of the past. Yet before the sound of the words of “reconciliation” by Robert Mugabe, the then Prime Minister of the newly independent Zimbabwe stopped ringing in the ears of Zimbabweans and the world, blood was letting in Midlands and Matabeleland regions in what became the infamous Gukuruhundi (1983-1987) in which about twenty-two thousand (22 000) perished in the atrocities. They wanted a “final solution” to ZAPU. Violence remained a weapon of choice in the political contestations up to this point.<sup>4</sup>

While the country is stuck in violent deliberations, the world moves on. The cost of violence is borne by the citizens. In the past months, reports of escalating cases of politically motivated violence have been noted<sup>5</sup>. The frequency and intensity of political violence increases whenever there are major political events, particularly elections. As the nation draws towards the 2018 Harmonised Elections more cases

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<sup>1</sup> Sachikonye, L. (2011). When a State Turns on its Citizens: 60 Years of Institutionalised Violence in Zimbabwe, African Books Collective.

<sup>2</sup> [www.thefreedictionary.com/Politically+motivated+violence](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Politically+motivated+violence)

<sup>3</sup> RAU (2011). Politically Motivated Violence against Women in Zimbabwe 2000-2010. A review of the public domain literature.  
<https://akcampaign.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/politically-motivated-violence-in-zimbabwe-2000-2010.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> See the Forum’s OVT reports at [www.hrforumzim.org](http://www.hrforumzim.org)

of violent conduct, vitriolic expressive metaphors and intimidation from and by political agencies are frequent. In a normal democracy, political contestations are critical and necessary, but they need to be free and fair, both substantively and procedurally. This is true for election contestations which should provide a non-violent means to the contestations for power, and unambiguously make society more peaceful. Those elected through this process, ideally should exercise their decision making powers, subject to the rule of law throughout the period they will be in power, and abide by the Constitution. This principle applies also to the rest of the citizens.

Unfortunately, this has not been the case in Zimbabwe; past political violence trends show accounts of reprisal violence, for example; in weeks towards the 2008 runoff election, MDC-T supporters were attacked incessantly by government agencies and ZANU PF supporters. The crisis brought the country to a standstill. Despite SADC's efforts to force the belligerent parties into a coalition government called the Government of National Unity, 2009-2013, ZANU PF and opposition parties remained strange bed fellows and took every opportunity to slime each other.

As Zimbabwe draws nearer to the 2018 elections, violent settlement of differences picks up again. While ordinary citizens continue to shoulder the brunt of political violence, violent confrontation between the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) officers in Harare CBD and uniformed forces of the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) on 01 August 2017 point to the testimony that violence is weapon of choice in Zimbabwe and little care about the consequences. Even in intra-party differences, violence is easy to deploy. For instance, the Movement for Democratic Change- Tsvangirayi (MDC-T) party has also been implicated in this intra-party violence recently in Bulawayo, when its party youth stormed into a meeting organised by three senior officials leaving one of the deputy presidents, Thokozani Khupe, hospitalised. The MDC leader, Morgan Tsvangirayi confirmed this violent incident in a statement issued on Monday 07 August 2017.

Violence by what ever means or description is bad for everyone. The costs of violent acts are heavier for the economy and relationships. The fury tempers and acts of retaliation often lead to cycles of violence making society less peaceful<sup>6</sup>. This has to be addressed. In April 2017, the IMF African Department director, Abebe Aemro Selassie noted the criticality of addressing violence in any given society. This is because it is not good for the economy. He notes "it is very important to have a more comprehensive policy package, which addresses a lot of the fiscal challenges that the country is facing and a lot of the structural reforms that have to be done to address Zimbabwe's economic meltdown." The economic implosion has contributed to social suffering and anger and the politicians take advantage of citizens' poverty and desperation to manipulate them into committing politically violent acts in the furtherance of their political capital.

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<sup>6</sup> The Political Violence Cycle S. P. HARISH New York University ANDREW T. LITTLE Cornell University

Earlier in July 2017, the anti-riot police violently disrupted demonstrating MDC-T youths along the streets of Harare who intended to present a petition to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission on issues of electoral reforms. This turned into violent show down affecting all and sundry. The victims reported that they were attacked with water cannons, rubber bullets, baton sticks, booted feet and tear gas just as they were gathering near the ZEC offices. Members of the public going about their business in the CBD were also victims in this attack. The victims also presented with gunshot (multiple lead pellets) wounds.

A trigger happy society is prone to violence as if there is no other means of resolving differences. A lot needs to be done, and now. Zimbabwe should not wait until it is too late. A turgid society drawing towards a watershed election will expect nothing but blood on the floor. This calls for the institutions like Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, National Peace and Reconciliation Commission and the Gender Commission to up their acts to ensure that Zimbabwe searches for and finds peace. The political will is important. A change in the methods of getting power must be arrived at the soonest, because the current approaches are costly, directly and indirectly, to our nation.

The Forum, therefore, condemns this violent behaviour in the strongest terms possible, and urges every Zimbabwean to value peace and desist from the use of all forms of violence as means of resolving disputes. To the political actors, the Forum also calls upon them to abide by the Code of Conduct for Political Parties, which obligates them to seek peace and maintain order. In view of the upcoming 2018 elections the Forum strongly discourages vexious language, metaphores and forms of communications, including actions, that incite violence; and urges all political leaders to uphold the rule of law, respect for human rights and democracy.

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