

OPEN LETTER TO THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE SADC ORGAN ON POLITICS, DEFENCE AND SECURITY COOPERATION

Your Excellency

We address you on the basis of your mandate as the overseer of the **Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation** (hereinafter referred to as 'The Organ'). Particularly drawing your attention to The Organ's mandate in terms of the Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security Co-operation, Article 11 (3) (b) to "...establish an early warning system in order to facilitate timely action to prevent the outbreak and escalation of conflict", which guided by the **Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ on Defence, Politics and Security (SIPO)** led to the creation of the Regional Early Warning Centre. All this meant to affirm SADC's concern not only with resolving intra and inter-state conflicts but also to anticipate and prevent the outbreak of violent conflicts in and between member states.

It is in this light that we the Heads of the undersigned Zimbabwean civil society coalitions wish to highlight to you our grave concerns over the continuously escalating political tensions in Zimbabwe. We strongly feel that if left unabated the current political polarisation fuelled by hate speech reigniting ethnic divisions, the rhetoric of violence and impending mass purging of civil servants and senior government officials might lead to an outbreak of overt violent conflict.

The recent dismissal of the Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa within 3 years after the summary dismissal of former Vice President Joyce Mujuru bears testimony to the volatility of the current political situation in Zimbabwe. The mistrust and hatred stemming from what the ruling party views as intra-party politics has had a spill-over effect into the government structures as seen in the anticipated mass purging of civil servants perceived to be inimical to the ruling party, ZANU PF. This growing number of discontent political elements embittered by dismissal from government positions is particularly worrying as it provides the munitions for violent political confrontation.

This is further exacerbated by the spike in hate speech at numerous political rallies held by the ruling party ZANU PF during which vitriol with ethnic undertones has been used to threaten political opponents with violence. The media is awash with harsh exchanges between political leaders as the tussle for power is becoming more and more heated each day. All this points to the high likelihood of violent conflict in Zimbabwe as the country is already steeped

in election mode ahead of the 2018 harmonized elections whilst also grappling with a failing economy. The rhetoric of coup plots against the seating Head of State and confrontations between politicians and security service chiefs is also particularly worrying. It is indicative of the extent to which political polarization which has been characterised as factionalism within the ruling party has further divided and destabilized the entire nation.

There is need for our political leadership to refrain from further onslaughts against their perceived opponents and to halt the mass purging of state officials and civil servants in the name of party cleansing. We call for your aid in amplifying our call for level-headedness and political tolerance among our political leaders to ensure that peace prevails in Zimbabwe.

The conflict we see looming in the horizon in Zimbabwe is indeed avoidable. If nothing is done to arrest the situation we are convinced that a conflict will ferment in Zimbabwe which will not only affect the millions of people living in Zimbabwe but will be of such a magnitude that it has the potential to destabilize the Southern Africa region.

We, as civil society in Zimbabwe, vividly recall the bloody conflicts that have characterized elections in Zimbabwe for the past decades. We are unnerved by the current tell-tale signs of impending violent conflict which is potentially going to be the worst the country has ever experienced. We therefore appeal to your office to not only closely monitor the situation in Zimbabwe but also to raise a red flag for the Organ to urgently intervene in Zimbabwe through preventive diplomacy and any other appropriate means as provided for in terms of Article 11 (3) (a) of the Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security Co-operation.

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