

## **Civic Groups Demand Hearing**

**Author:** [Mike Nyoni](#)

Zimbabwean non-government organisations say their concerns are ignored because they are shut out of political talks.

Negotiators at the Zimbabwe crisis talks in Pretoria, South Africa, are under growing pressure from civic organisations which want to be more directly involved in the process.

As talks between the main political parties continued beyond the August 4 deadline, all three leaders – President Robert Mugabe of ZANU-PF and Morgan Tsvangirai and Arthur Mutambara of the two factions of the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC – indicated that they were largely happy with the progress of the talks. Tsvangirai pointed out that some “sticking-points” remained.

Analysts believe the obstacles to progress could be fundamental differences at the negotiations over whether Mugabe or his main rival Tsvangirai should lead a transitional government. Both of them claim that right, based on two different election results – the March 29 poll in which Tsvangirai got more votes than Mugabe, and the June 27 run-off which Tsvangirai boycotted, citing violence against his supporters.

For Zimbabwe’s main civil society organisations, neither man is acceptable. A group of these organisations said in mid-July that they would not recognise an interim administration headed by Mugabe or Tsvangirai, and instead wanted to see a neutral figure fill the role.

As the talks dragged on past their two-week deadline this week, more organisations voiced demands to have a greater say in the talks process.

The militant Progressive Teachers’ Union of Zimbabwe, PTUZ, which claims to represent the interests of most teachers in the country, voiced concern at the restricted number of participants in the negotiations, from which it said the “voice of civic society” was palpably missing.

Only political parties are involved in the talks in Pretoria.

“It is our conviction that dialogue would have been more meaningful if the players were broadened than is the current scenario. Reducing participants to ZANU-PF and two MDC formations led by Tsvangirai and Mutambara is at best too simplistic and at worst a fabrication of political processes,” said a statement issued by the PTUZ, recalling that the negotiations which led to Zimbabwean independence in 1980 were “broader than the current dialogue”.

The trade union indicated that it was sceptical that the talks could succeed in their present format, given the deep divisions between ZANU-PF and the MDC and the “secrecy and mystery” surrounding the talks.

The Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, an umbrella body which represents 350 organisations, also expressed concern about whether the process would result in an effective political deal – and it warned against “quick fixes” which “do not address the constitutional and democratic deficit”.

“The coalition is utterly opposed to a pact agreed between the political elite which does not adequately address the socioeconomic and political crisis, which is by and large... a crisis of governance and legitimacy,” the group said in media advertisements this week.

The Media Alliance of Zimbabwe, which brings together key players from the sector, has a particular interest in ensuring that any new constitution that comes out of the talks contains specific guarantees of free speech.

However, the alliance complained this week that with no media figures present at the negotiations, and participants barred from even speaking to reporters, it was not in a position to press this important demand.

The Zimbabwe Human Rights Association also said the talks should have been “more inclusive”, with “the input of civil society organisations”.

So far, politicians appear to be ignoring such calls for greater inclusivity or a broader forum.

An analyst who did not want to be named said that whatever the merits of such demands, the short deadline set by the July 21 Memorandum of Understanding did not allow of it.

The analysts said it was feared that expanding the format of the process would make it harder to stop information leaking out.

“The real fear is that expanding the negotiating process could raise more dust than shed light on the way forward,” he said. “The real key issues in the current negotiations are about leadership, so there is simply no meaningful role for any of these civic society organisations.”

Mike Nyoni is the pseudonym of a reporter in Zimbabwe.

**Location:** [Africa](#)

**Focus:** [Zimbabwe Crisis Reports](#)

---

**Source URL:** <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/civic-groups-demand-hearing>