

MDC Hit by More Rumblings of Discontent

Author: [Meshack Ndodana](#)

Some disgruntled members are even calling for a new party to be formed.

The largest faction in the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, could split following a row over Morgan Tsvangirai's sacking of a senior female party official, say analysts.

At a crisis meeting on November 3, the MDC's national executive refused to endorse the decision of its leader to replace the head of the powerful Women's Assembly, Lucia Matibenga, with Theresa Makone - the wife of Tsvangirai's friend and financier, Ian Makone.

"This is a fatal case of poor judgment on the part of Tsvangirai," said a University of Zimbabwe, UZ, political scientist who has monitored developments in the party since its formation in 1999.

"The decision to [sack] Matibenga is very depressing and I think now people are beginning to realise that Tsvangirai cannot think strategically."

The dismissal of Matibenga - who the MDC chief accused of being a "mole" on the payroll of the ruling party - has been challenged by a number of normally firm supporters, including party spokesperson Nelson Chamisa, national organising secretary Elias Mudzuri, deputy secretary general Tapiwa Mashakada, Kwekwe MP Blessing Chebundo and youth leader Thamsanqa Mahlangu.

These people form the backbone of his party and commentators say that this row could presage a damaging split in the faction just months before presidential and parliamentary elections early next year.

Strong objections to Matibenga's replacement prompted the national executive to defer the matter to November 11. In this meeting, party chairman Lovemore Moyo is expected to explain how Makone's election was handled.

Sources say Matibenga has been victimised for being too critical of Tsvangirai and the party's secretary-general Tendai Biti, both of whom she accuses of monopolising the party

The MDC split into two factions in 2005, when Tsvangirai chose to boycott elections for a newly created upper house of parliament, or Senate, which would include traditional chiefs - generally supporters of ruling party ZANU-PF - and presidential appointees.

Since then, Tsvangirai has headed the bigger faction, the other MDC, which took part in the Senate vote, led by Arthur Mutambara.

The UZ political scientist, who preferred not to be named, said that since 2005, Tsvangirai's has been losing support among his most loyal followers.

“There was a lot of sympathy with Tsvangirai when the MDC first split in October 2005, because a lot of people felt the Senate was an unnecessary waste of resources,” said the analyst.

However, he said that Tsvangirai no longer seems to care what eventually happens to the MDC and is more concerned with pleasing his friends.

“In 2005, he adopted the same stance when the party split, declaring if the Senate issue meant the MDC should die, he was prepared to let it die. Now he wants to kill the party just to accommodate his cronies,” he said.

Another analyst close to the goings-on in the MDC said that with his decision to oust Matibenga, Tsvangirai had gone too far.

“The least I can say is that this time he has bitten off more than he can chew and will need to rethink,” said the analyst, who preferred to remain anonymous.

“The time is fast approaching when his close supporters will start challenging him for his position, not just criticising his ability to lead the party and win an election.”

The analyst said the sane thing for Tsvangirai to have done when he realised his decision to sack Matibenga was unpopular would have been to reverse it at after the MDC national executive meeting on November 3.

“We may not know the full story about what is going on in the party but the truth is that a leader who makes such a big blunder just before a crucial election does not wish to be taken seriously,” continued the analyst. “It is his commitment to the democratic cause that is coming under scrutiny. That is why there are even calls by some of his MPs for another party.”

The analyst added that what is most worrying is the way in which the party is gradually coming to resemble ZANU-PF in terms of internal squabbles and the arrogance of the leadership.

“The only major difference [between the two leaders] is that President Robert Mugabe is able to contain the divisions within his party,” he said.

Meshack Ndodana is the pseudonym of an IWPR journalist in Zimbabwe.

Location: Zimbabwe

Topic: Zimbabwe

Focus: Zimbabwe Crisis Reports

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/mdc-hit-more-rumblings-discontent>