

## **Mugabe Faces Growing ZANU PF Resistance**

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ZANU PF sources say there was intense behind-the-scenes manoeuvring to stop Mugabe's extended power bid at the recent party conference.

President Robert Mugabe's attempt to extend his hold on power until 2010 has sent shock waves through Zimbabwean industry and commerce and, more significantly, galvanising opponents within his party.

At Mugabe's ruling ZANU PF party conference on December 16-17, held at Goromonzi, 40 kilometres east of the capital, Harare, the president tried to arm-twist his party into endorsing a motion that would have seen him renege on his promise to step down from power at the end of his current tenure in 2008.

In recent interviews with both local and international media, Mugabe explained that he wished to continue as the country's head of state and government because it would be imprudent of him to step down while his party was in what he described as a "shambles".

Although the majority of delegates at Goromonzi supported his move to remain at the helm for at least another three year, meaning he would have been in power for thirty years, he did not get the overwhelming endorsement he sought. Only six out of ten provinces supported the extension of his rule.

Instead of Mugabe being crowned state president at the conference until 2010, the motion was referred back to the provinces for a final decision at a later date.

Ruling party sources told IWPR there was intense behind-the-scenes manoeuvring to stop Mugabe's extended power bid, with panic evident among captains of industry and commerce as the drama unfolded at Goromonzi.

The country representative of a multinational audit firm said many companies had decided to scale down on their operations as a consequence of Mugabe's declared ambitions. "It doesn't matter that no resolution was made at the conference to extend Mugabe's term," he said. "The mere attempt itself was shocking."

He added that no multinational company would be happy to keep pouring human and financial energy into an economy that is now poised to suffer more battering than ever before as a result of the uncertainty wrought by Mugabe's probable extended stay in power. "We are scaling down our operations here and so will many companies," he said. "The idea is just to keep a token presence in anticipation of better days."

He said many companies were approaching his organisation for due diligence audits to facilitate their partial exits from the country.

The giant London-based Anglo American mining consortium, once the owner of forty per cent of Zimbabwe's private sector, has almost totally liquidated its holdings. The Mobil and BP oil companies are removing their signs from petrol stations throughout the country in what looks like preparation for their planned exits.

"We're dead," said Juliet Masiya, a Harare travel consultant. "He's old and has nothing new to offer except continued disintegration."

Many industries in Zimbabwe are working at only thirty per cent capacity while thousands of others have shut down completely. "We're going to see huge disinvestments from Zimbabwe," said the audit company representative. "Maybe only the mining sector will survive, but even then only the big companies that have poured in huge amounts of money into infrastructure and other developments. Otherwise the small miners are also going to pack up."

But it is at the political level that the drama is most riveting. "Mugabe's promise that he would not leave office because ZANU PF is in a shambles is shocking to say the least," one senior party official, a Mugabe-appointed provincial governor, told IWPR. "It means Mugabe values the party ahead of the country. Everyone, including in ZANU PF, knows that Mugabe is at the epicentre of the political crisis."

The main opposition political party, the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, is in disarray and has yet to make a powerful response to events at Goromonzi. But it is within ZANU PF itself that the crisis is playing itself out.

Powerful ZANU PF politburo member and former commander of the army Solomon Mujuru is spearheading the fight against Mugabe's continued stay in power beyond 2008. Mujuru's tentacles spread like an octopus across industry and commerce in one of the biggest business empires ever built in Zimbabwe. To protect the empire Mujuru - leader of Mugabe's pre-independence exiled liberation army under the war name Rex Nhongo - wants his wife, Vice President Joice Mujuru, to succeed to the most powerful post in the land.

But the possibility of this happening would be diminished if Mugabe does not step down in 2008.

In a rare show of a common stance, the other faction in ZANU PF, led by the wily former head of intelligence Emmerson Mnangagwa, has also come out strongly, though somewhat more subtly, against Mugabe.

Sources say the factions are clandestinely going for rapprochement. They are agreed on the steps that have to be taken first before taking Mugabe head on.

The first step, the sources say, would be to remove George Charamba, the powerful civil service secretary for information and Mugabe's spokesman. Charamba controls single-handedly the state press. It is he, say the Mujuru and Mnangagwa factions, who has to be disabled because he is entirely responsible for whatever the dominant state-owned newspapers, radio and television say about the political crisis.

The factions also want to see the exit of the head of the much-feared Central Intelligence Organisation chief, Happyton Bonyongwe. Not only does the CIO control a newspaper group, Mirror Newspapers, but Mugabe has also militarised the spy agency so that he as commander-in-chief of the national army has immense control over Bonyongwe, a former military officer.

The third step would be to remove the ambitious Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe governor Gideon Gono who has emerged as Mugabe's most important lieutenant in the fight to remain in power. Gono takes instruction straight from Mugabe and has been ordered to print inflationary money to finance his master's extended power project.

Mugabe's plan is to harmonise the next 2008 presidential election and the next 2010 parliamentary election into one single poll in 2010, arguing that this would save money and simplify the electoral organisation. Few disagree with the superficial logic. But key ZANU PF politicians argue that Mugabe is trying to become president-for-life "via the back door" of a term extension, finally leaving office only on a hearse.

Diplomats assert that the events at Goromonzi open an even darker chapter for the people of Zimbabwe, who have already suffered enormously since the country began its precipitous decline at the end of the last decade of the twentieth century. They say that soon the diplomatic community and the few states that still cooperate with Zimbabwe will have no choice but to abandon the country. "I think the time has come when the world has to say, 'Let's leave this to the Zimbabweans themselves'," one western diplomat told IWPR. He castigated the opposition for not immediately responding powerfully to 82-year-old Mugabe's manoeuvrings. "It's a sign of this complex Zimbabwean mentality that we in the West can never understand," he said. "In the West we would call this docility. Zimbabweans should know that ultimately their life in their own hands."

Veteran foreign newspaper and broadcasting correspondent Peta Thornycroft said, "It seems impossible that Zimbabwe can even go on to 2008 with Mugabe in power. The situation is truly unravelling with the inflation. Believe me, the official inflation rate of 1100

per cent is not true. The real inflation rate is nearer to 2000 per cent."

Zimbabwe has very few remaining friends, most of them in the Far East. Besides China, North Korea and Iran, the Mugabe regime is short of allies elsewhere, even on the African continent. Zimbabwe's neighbours in southern Africa have a lukewarm relationship with it. They are likely to withdraw what little sympathy remains because they now see Mugabe as the region's Achilles heel.

Many see his recent conference shenanigans as the much awaited "tipping point". More than eighty per cent of the people of Zimbabwe are living in deep poverty and life expectancy for women has plummeted from a high in 1990 of more than 60 to just 34 years.

For men life expectancy is not much higher at 37. The country which used to be the region's breadbasket is now a net importer of food. This current planting season is headed for disaster. Poor rains, the perennial excuse, will be trotted out once again by officials, but the main reason is bungling by the ministries responsible for agriculture.

Recently, it was discovered that vital fertiliser imported from South Africa was substandard. Also during the ill-advised "land reform" programme, beginning in 2000, Mugabe allowed his supporters to loot equipment from commercial farms confiscated from whites. Much of the equipment was vital for irrigation. It has simply disappeared in a country that experiences a drought every three seasons, meaning that irrigation is the only way to ensure food security.

"People have become desperately helpless. Yes, Zimbabweans are notoriously docile but I have this hunch feeling that the time has come when even the docile mule will begin to kick," said one Harare resident.

Indeed, some pockets of resistance have begun to emerge with people demonstrating peacefully at set times against the regime. These demonstrations include lunchtime marches, blowing of car horns and beating of metal objects for five minutes at a time to make a loud protest noise.

One group has been consistent in these demos: Women of Zimbabwe Arise, WOZA, has been involved in these kinds of protests for the past half decade and people are beginning to feel the WOZA presence.

Soon others may feel compelled to join in.

Many commentators fear Mugabe may be faced with a violent exit and the country subsequently with enormous turmoil.

They say this based on disgruntlement in the uniformed forces. Lower ranks in the army and the police are among the poorest Zimbabweans. Many have left the employ of the state but many, especially those who live not in camps but among civilians, have begun to openly voice their

disillusionment.

The long-awaited trigger may just be the levels of unashamed corruption among Mugabe's lieutenants. Uncertain themselves about their future, government and parastatal officials have upped their corrupt activities. Recently, there has been a upsurge in farm evictions in which senior government officials are taking over the holdings of "new farmers" - black peasants for whom once white-owned land was earmarked.

Benedict Unendoro is the pseudonym of an IWPR contributor in Zimbabwe.

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