

## **National Healing Process Urged**

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Victims of violence and church and community leaders call for new unity government to establish a truth and reconciliation commission.

Emmanuel Chiroto, an opposition councillor and mayor of Harare, is moved to tears as he recalls the abduction and brutal murder of his wife, Abigail, by armed militia loyal to President Robert Mugabe and his ZANU-PF party during the blood-soaked period preceding the June 27 presidential run-off election.

"Nothing will ever bring my wife back, but the perpetrators of this are still there roaming the streets," he told IWPR. "Justice must be served and if [the newly formed] inclusive government fails to deal with this issue there will never be national healing. How do I work with people who murdered my wife? They must tell me who sent them to kill my wife and how they did it. There has to be a way to secure justice. Our hearts are sore."

In terms of the agreement signed in September by Mugabe, Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, and Arthur Mutambara, leader of a breakaway MDC faction, which provided for a government of national unity, to which the MDC finally agreed on January 30, also calls for a process of national healing in Zimbabwe, but does not say what form this should take.

It also omits to mention whether senior members of ZANU-PF and the military, who are accused of masterminding the political violence, including the murder of more than 200 people in the run-up to the June vote, should face justice.

According to prime minister-designate Tsvangirai, senior members of ZANU-PF should face trial for political violence, though he does not believe Mugabe himself should be tried. ZANU-PF, however, and Mutambara's faction of the MDC believe that any action taken should be aimed at "achieving national healing rather than punishment and retribution".

Chiroto, one of 45 MDC councillors in Harare, is unequivocal on the issue – for him punishment of those who murdered his wife is the only acceptable option.

"I have problems forgetting and forgiving the people who killed my wife," he said. "Justice must one day be meted out to whoever organised the killing. What do I tell my son when he grows up?"

A hit squad descended on Chiroto's Hatcliffe home on June 16 last year, the day after he was elected mayor, firebombing the house and reducing it to cinder. The attackers then seized 27-year-old Abigail and the couple's four-year-old son, Ashley, and bundled them into one of two double-cab trucks with no number plates. Some of the kidnappers wore military uniforms, said witnesses. Chiroto was not at home at the time.

On June 18 the dreaded phone call came – Abigail's body had been discovered on a farm near Borrowdale – her head crushed, her tongue sliced off, probably to muffle her screams, and her eyes gouged out.

Church leaders in Zimbabwe have called on parties to the inclusive government to establish a truth and reconciliation commission, TRC, similar to that set up in South Africa to expose apartheid-era crimes, to

investigate the violence that followed the disputed March 29 general election which was won by the MDC but without a sufficient majority for Tsvangirai to become president without a run-off vote.

A 20-strong church delegation comprising representatives from the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference and the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance, ZCA, met Tsvangirai on February 2 and agreed to support the new government, but requested the establishment of a TRC.

ZCA spokesman Raymond Motsi told IWPR that there was a need to resolve the divisions and injustices of the past. However, he said this would only be possible if there was full disclosure by perpetrators of human rights violations and other wrongs as well as some form of justice for victims.

"Churches are saying the truth, justice and reconciliation process should start once a new inclusive government is in place. That should mark the beginning of the transitional justice system," Motsi said. "This process should not be left to the political parties alone. It should not be elitist and should not be a political decision between ZANU-PF and the MDC."

A spokesman for the civil society group the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition believes that "joint peace rallies should be convened by leaders of all parties to promote peace and reconciliation. True peace and lasting unity will only be achieved once past human rights abuses are fully addressed".

The former archbishop of Cape Town and Nobel peace laureate, Desmond Tutu, who led South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and, in the past, has called for a military invasion of Zimbabwe to topple Mugabe, has now urged world leaders to back the inclusive government in the interests of reconstructing the shattered lives of the Zimbabwean people. He has also appealed for an end to the "totally unacceptable" violence.

"My heart aches for Zimbabwe. Your countrymen and women have suffered greatly," he said. "It is in your power to stop the violence if you act as one. You have an opportunity now to stand up for peace."

But a defiant Mugabe, who has denied orchestrating the election-related violence that killed and injured hundreds and displaced thousands, has demanded security guarantees for himself and his Joint Operations Command - a think tank of army generals who reportedly planned and executed the violence.

Official sources say secret guarantees of immunity against prosecution were negotiated between Mugabe and Tsvangirai, facilitated by SADC-appointed broker, former South African president Thabo Mbeki, and include crimes committed as far back as the 1980s, when thousands of opponents of ZANU-PF were massacred in Matabeleland; the murders that took place during the land grab initiated in 2000; the brutal army-led Operation Drive Out Filth of 2005, which left more than 700 000 homeless after bulldozers moved into townships and flattened homes; and last year's election-related violence.

Chipo Sithole is the pseudonym of an IWPR reporter in Zimbabwe.

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