

New Power-Sharing Agreement Brings Hope

Author: [Chipo Sithole](#)

Deal reached at this week's emergency SADC summit may finally give Zimbabwe a government. A ray of hope has been flickering in Zimbabwe amid the filth, disease and wasted lives since President Robert Mugabe's ruling ZANU-PF party and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, agreed on January 26 to share power, potentially ushering in the political stability critical for economic recovery.

After an all-night emergency summit of Southern African leaders at South Africa's Presidential Guest House in Pretoria, the MDC indicated a willingness to enter a unity government with Mugabe.

The decision – which follows four months of deadlock since a power-sharing deal was signed on September 15 between Mugabe and opposition rivals Morgan Tsvangirai and Arthur Mutambara, leaders of the two factions of the MDC – has still, however, to be endorsed by the MDC's supreme decision-making body, the 135-member National Council, which will meet on January 30.

If, indeed, the truce holds, long-suffering Zimbabweans may at last get a new government. The country has effectively been without leadership since the disputed elections of March 29 last year.

The January 26 breakthrough, besides being a victory for diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis and a testament to the give-and-take nature of politics, offers hope of a resurgence of the moribund economy, which, experts have warned, will show negative growth for the tenth successive year if nothing is done to save it.

"If the MDC national council endorses the decision to join government it will no doubt give confidence to investors," said an investment analyst in Harare, while Karikoga Kaseke, chief executive of the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, saw it as "a good start for Zimbabwe to get back on her feet".

Although one of the terms of the deal is the establishment of a 31-member cabinet, which will put considerable strain on the country's finances, the business community received the news of the agreement with a sigh of relief.

"It's a big sign of hope," said businessman William Murota. The deal would have a direct impact on the stock market, he believed, with foreign investors again trading on the local bourse, which has been shut for two months, since the central bank accused traders of using fraudulent cheques.

"We need to re-establish the credibility of the country," said Murota. "It will not be easy; it will require the combined efforts of both government and the private sector."

In terms of the deal, Mugabe will remain president, but, in a communiqué issued early on January 27, the SADC said it had been decided that on February 11 Tsvangirai will be sworn in as prime minister. His two deputies will also take the oath of office that day while other ministers and their deputies will be sworn in on February 13. Parliament will convene next week to start the legislative process required to back the deal.

The SADC leaders have pushed Mugabe into making a series of concessions, including reversing all executive appointments he has made since the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding in September. He has also undertaken to review the appointment of the new attorney-general, Johannes Tomana, a staunch ZANU-PF supporter, and the renewal of the mandate of reserve bank governor Gideon Gono, who has presided over the highest inflation rate in the world.

The SADC has also forced Mugabe to share out the ten provincial governorships he had unilaterally allocated to his party. The regional bloc resolved that the party that had won the majority of seats in a province in last year's parliamentary elections should govern that province.

In terms of the deal, Tsvangirai's portion of the MDC will have five provincial governors, ZANU-PF four and Mutambara's breakaway MDC faction one. All senior appointments in government and its agencies will be reviewed once the MDC is in government.

SADC sided with Mugabe in insisting that the rival parties should share the vital cabinet portfolio of home affairs, which oversees the police, who have been accused of kidnapping and brutalising opposition supporters. Other ministerial portfolios remain heavily skewed in favour of Mugabe, who retains control of all the security ministries and the lion's share of powerful ministries, but SADC has recommended that the parties review all ministerial appointments after six months.

On January 30 ZANU-PF and opposition negotiators will resume talks, facilitated by SADC-appointed broker Thabo Mbeki, the former South Africa president, to choose governors and debate the National Security Council legislation, which defines the parameters of the security forces.

The meeting will also establish a Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee to oversee issues of compliance with the memorandum of understanding and the terms of the deal.

While hope is dawning in some quarters in Zimbabwe, not everybody is optimistic that the new government will succeed. Eldred Masunungure, a political science professor at the University of Zimbabwe, believes "this resolution doesn't resolve anything".

Calling it "a victory for Mugabe and ZANU-PF", he said "there isn't much for the people of Zimbabwe to enjoy".

Some have expressed fears that Mugabe will use the arrangement to draw in and marginalise the MDC, as he has done with other opposition groups in the past. Critics say the power-sharing deal is reminiscent of the Unity Accord of 1987, when ZANU-PF merged with Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU organisation, effectively swallowing it whole.

The MDC, too, is less than euphoric. "Quite clearly, the conclusions reached as reflected fall far short of our expectations," MDC spokesman Nelson Chamisa said in a statement issued shortly after the conclusion of the meeting.

But he added that "it is important that finality be brought to this issue" and that the MDC's forthcoming national council meeting would "define the party position". The party's policy coordinator, Eddie Cross, predicted that the council would endorse the decision to join government.

Even with a government finally in place, experts believe Zimbabwe's economic future will depend on the quality of the international support it receives. The country owes more than 5 billion US dollars to the African Development Bank and international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Another problem is that western governments have categorically stated that they will not back any new government that retains Mugabe as head of state and this week the European Union added 25 officials and 36 companies linked to President Mugabe's administration to a list of banned allies of the Zimbabwe regime because of their links to suspected human rights abuses.

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

Location: Africa

Focus: Zimbabwe Crisis Reports

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/new-power-sharing-agreement-brings-hope>