

Newspaper Chief says Army Runs the Country

Author: [IWPR](#)

A leading journalist and publisher, whose passport has been confiscated by the intelligence services, claims Mugabe no longer holds the reins of power.

Trevor Ncube, chairman of the Africa board of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, has hit out fiercely at Zimbabwe's ruling elite, alleging that the deeply troubled southern African state is now effectively being ruled by the military and the intelligence agencies rather than by President Robert Mugabe.

The Zimbabwe passport of Ncube, a distinguished journalist and publisher, was confiscated by the much-feared Central Intelligence Organisation, CIO, when he arrived in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second city, from Johannesburg on December 7.

It appears Ncube's name was one of 60 on a list compiled by the Zimbabwean government to have their travel documents confiscated as they passed through passport control on their way either to or from Zimbabwe.

"The seizure of my passport reminds me that I am not living in a normal society," said Ncube said in a lengthy interview with IWPR. "As someone who has been declared an enemy of the state, I am aware anything can happen. I have been receiving mysterious phone calls, which are quite worrying."

Ncube has filed an urgent appeal in Zimbabwe's High Court challenging the seizure of his passport by the state.

Ncube publishes the Zimbabwe Independent and the Standard newspapers, both weeklies and the country's last two truly independent titles, while from Johannesburg he publishes the legendary Mail and Guardian, which was a thorn in the side of the apartheid and is now a trenchant critic of the ruling African National Congress.

"It has become clear Mugabe is not running the country," said the publisher. "Remember after Operation Murambatsvina. It was revealed that it was the Central Intelligence Organisation that was behind it." Operation Murambatsvina, which translates into Shona as "Operation Drive Out The Rubbish", resulted in somewhere between 750,000 and 2.3 million Zimbabweans being made homeless when police, soldiers and militias of the ruling ZANU PF party moved into working class suburbs in the cities and towns, hotbeds of support for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, and razed many thousands of homes with bulldozers and sledgehammers.

"Mugabe has no intention to leave [the presidency], and in fulfilment of that he now relies more and more on the military," continued Ncube. "In other words we have a military dictatorship in place.

"This [passport seizure] operation, it's dictated by the 'securocrats', who are the real people running this country. They include (Registrar General) Tobaiwa Mudede and (Immigration Director) Elasto Mugwadi - but the people pulling the strings are military men.

"Mugabe's spokesman George Charamba, 24 hours after the seizure of my passport, was adamant nothing like that could happen in Zimbabwe. Attorney General SobhuzaGula-Ndebele himself was also in the dark:

he said it could not happen because there is no legislation in place to allow the state to seize people's passports.

"You see, when civil structures fail to deliver the military and the intelligence agencies take over. That is why Army Commander Constantine Chiwengwa is now being touted as a possible presidential successor."

Asked if he feared that the next step by the intelligence services and the military would be to detain him, Ncube said the picture was much bigger than that. "They want my newspapers," he said. "They want the Zimbabwe Independent and The Standard."

"They have been unable to do with us what they have done with Ibbo Mandaza's Mirror newspapers and what they have done with the Financial Gazette, namely to control them through the CIO buying into them through the back door."

"They know I stand to lose a lot if I am unable to return to South Africa. They think I will leave the country illegally so they can have something to pin on me. Then they will specify me and my newspapers [for criminal offences] and that way take over my business."

Asked if he felt physically safe, Ncube replied in the negative but went on, "I feel watched and listened to but I am a highly spiritual person who believes strongly that God has my life in his hands. But that is no reason to be careless and foolish. I won't walk into just any pub, nor will I walk in dark alleys nor drive at odd hours of the night."

Ncube said it was now clear to him that there was no future for either ZANU PF or the opposition MDC in a future Zimbabwe. So, he was asked, what then is to be done?

"I have talked [and written] about a third way," said the 43-year-old newspaperman. "It [the future] belongs to us, the younger generation. We should find the middle ground - that is, we should find the good people in Zanu PF and good people in the MDC. We should find good people from across the board to speed up our nation's aspirations. Let's start afresh. Mugabe and his generation delivered us independence but they had no vision to take the country into the 21st century."

"It needs principled people. Unfortunately Zimbabweans are short on principles. They are easily bought. We need to redefine who we are and move forward. We need to establish the principle that never again will we allow conditions that would raise another Mugabe, a situation where the national constitution is trashed and our country ruined."

But how, Ncube was asked, has President Mugabe been allowed to get away with ruining a once prosperous country, where inflation is more than 500 per cent and rising, the highest in the world, and where the gross domestic product has declined absolutely each year for the past seven years?

"Mugabe is highly intelligent, a shrewd schemer, a real political fox," said Ncube. He has played factions off against one another - workers pitted against employers; students manipulated; the general populace manipulated against "first gays and lesbians and then white commercial farmers ... He has surrounded himself with the greatest bootlickers when it was necessary to get really intelligent and robust people to move the country forward".

Turning to the international community's response to the Zimbabwe crisis and the widespread abuse of human rights, Ncube singled out South Africa for particular criticism, asserting that its president, Thabo Mbeki, had let down the ordinary people of Zimbabwe. "If Mbeki had refused to endorse the clearly stolen 2000 parliamentary election, I don't think Zimbabwe would be in the fine mess it finds itself in right now," he said. The crucial 2000 election, which the MDC lost only narrowly, was widely condemned as rigged by most non-African countries and human rights organisations, but endorsed by most African leaders.

"The British miscalculated in thinking insulting Mugabe would shake him," he said. "No one can beat Mugabe at insults."

And, Ncube asserted, in combating Mugabe the rest of the world had to take into account the paradox that beyond Zimbabwe he is an idol to downtrodden Africans, "He is a hero of a Third World short-changed by the West."

Ncube said a tipping point would eventually come against the security establishment, Mugabe and ZANU PF, although it was unlikely to be sudden - more an accumulation of events. "However, a most unexpected little thing can ignite it," he added. "The general Zimbabwean has lost his self-respect and become docile and controllable. But even zombies can be unpredictable."

Chipo Chinemberi is the pseudonym of a journalist in Zimbabwe.

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