

## **ZANU-PF Leadership Divisions Mount**

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Growing evidence of split in ruling party over its candidate for presidential election next year. With ZANU-PF stalwarts distancing themselves from the intensive campaign by war veterans to ensure President Robert Mugabe holds onto power, all is clearly not well in the ruling party, say analysts.

These signs of division within the party over who will govern Zimbabwe come just two months before ZANU-PF meets to choose its presidential candidate for what many here see as a watershed poll next year.

The veteran leader turns 84 next February and has already shown his willingness to stand for another term despite being in power since 1980 and having presided over the collapse of the country's once-model economy. He is one of Africa's longest-serving leaders.

The war veterans, erstwhile heroes of Zimbabwe's 1970s war of liberation, are already planning what they have termed the "million men march" to support Mugabe's stay in power. Since 2000, when the expropriation of white-owned commercial farms intensified, the war veterans have been Mugabe's most vocal and violent supporters. Their support has become even more vocal in the wake of public spats within ruling party ranks over who will take the party to the next generation.

The Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association, ZINLWA - a belligerent force that has since been incorporated by the authorities into an official reserve army - began staging marches across the country two months ago, campaigning for Mugabe as the only ZANU-PF candidate.

Leader of the war veterans Jabulani Sibanda was suspended from the party after his alleged participation in an attempted 2004 palace coup to oust Mugabe. However, he claims that Mugabe orchestrated his return to the party fold "through the back door".

But when the veterans this month took their march to Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second largest city, deep cracks within the ruling party emerged.

Situated in the heart of Matabeleland, Bulawayo is home to former members of ZAPU, Zimbabwe African People's Union, who, after being crushed during the Gukurahundi confrontation of the 1980s and swallowed up in the 1987 Unity Accord, became loyalists of the ruling ZANU-PF.

When Sibanda took his campaign to Bulawayo, an opposition Movement of Democratic Change, MDC, stronghold, where local ruling party heavyweights would have been expected to rally behind him, former ZAPU stalwarts ignored him. Vice-president Joseph Msika has distanced himself from the marches and is one of several politicians to have criticised Sibanda's involvement in Mugabe's campaign, although he still insists he is behind Mugabe.

"Sibanda was expelled from the party a long time ago. He has no mandate to campaign for the party or its president. He has to stop," said Msika early this month after Sibanda led the Bulawayo march in support of Mugabe, adding that he would not join the maverick war veterans' leader in his marches in support of Mugabe's 2008 candidacy.

Msika is said to be a former confidant of the late Joshua Nkomo, leader of ZAPU who forged the Unity Accord with Mugabe in 1987 and became Zimbabwe's vice-president under Mugabe until his death in 1999.

Mugabe increasingly seems to be sidelining these former ZAPU stalwarts who he sees as a stumbling block to his unbridled ambition to be the country's life president. In the ongoing war veterans' campaign, they have been declared enemies of the president. This has not gone down well with these senior politicians who have also voiced their opposition to the former fighters' leader, Sibanda.

In another sign that Sibanda has only succeeded in estranging Mugabe from his erstwhile comrades from ZAPU, these Matebeleland politicians have reportedly sought an audience with Mugabe "to remind him of the Unity Accord".

Though the officials have tried to play down these reports, Sibanda seems to have confirmed his place in the party's internal squabbles with questions being asked by some Bulawayo-based war veterans how somebody who was expelled from the party could lead the so-called solidarity marches in support of Mugabe, according to some media reports here.

These differences have arisen against the background of the Southern African Development Community, SADC, efforts to broker the troubled nation's crisis. Analysts insist war veterans are throwing spanners in the works because one of the sticking points of the negotiations between ZANU-PF and the opposition MDC is Mugabe's exit.

"We are in for a long wait in the solving of the crisis with the war veterans throwing their weight behind Mugabe when everybody else seems to see the future of the country without him," a Bulawayo-based political commentator told IWPR.

"The divisions rocking ZANU-PF do not point to any reforms as long as the war veterans march across the country supporting Mugabe, without...letting the party congress decide the party's [presidential] candidate."

It is generally believed that the former ZAPU leadership is fed up with Mugabe and would rather have another leader come December. Indications are that they support the faction led by retired army commander General Solomon Mujuru in the internal ZANU-PF power struggle.

Mugabe says he will stand because he does not want the party to be divided over who will take over from him, yet the nationwide marches seeking to impose him as the party's candidate for next year's polls appear to be doing just that.

"This is just what the country does not need," said a Jesuit priest who has lived in Zimbabwe for over thirty years and a close Mugabe watcher.

"If only people were left to choose their leaders, the marches [by war veterans] would not have any relevance. But then Zimbabwe offers many bad examples of how war veterans have been empowered by politicians who seek to pursue power for power's sake."

Zimbabwe's war veterans have in the past been accused of fomenting political violence ahead of elections, and their endorsement of Mugabe before the ruling party's congress in December points to the possibility of another election marred by violence.

Already, human rights organisations here say they have recorded an escalation of politically-motivated violence in recent months. One faction of the divided MDC has already indicated it could be pulling out of the South Africa-mediated talks with ZANU-PF if state-sponsored violence is not stopped

Observers say that if war veterans can browbeat party officials as they did in Bulawayo, ordinary voters remain at their mercy as they seek Mugabe's re-election.

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