

Zimbabwe at the Crossroads: A Chance for a New Beginning

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Thank you, Chairman Flake, Ranking Member Booker, and other members of the Subcommittee. We thank you for inviting us to this great center of American democracy.

The 14th of November 2017 began a series major life changing events in Zimbabwe that will forever redefine the political and constitutional landscape of the country.

On that day, military tanks invaded the streets of the capital, Harare, and other major cities in the country. In the early hours of the 15th, the military appeared on Zimbabwe's sole national television and implicitly made it clear that the executive was no longer in control.

On 18th November, hundreds of thousands of Zimbabweans marched alongside military personnel in the streets of Harare and Bulawayo and demanded the resignation of President Mugabe. On 21 November in the middle of impeachment proceedings in parliament, President Mugabe quietly, if not in-elegantly, announced his resignation.

With President Mugabe's departure, Zimbabwe now faces an uncertain future, but one which presents real opportunities for reconstructing, rebuilding and re-fabricating a new Zimbabwean story, and a new Zimbabwean society.

Without a doubt, the 37 years of President Mugabe's rule were a sad story of capture, coercion, corruption, poverty and de-legitimization. Zimbabweans lived in fear under a system that paid no respect to their rights and a system that saw continuous impoverishment and suffering, loss of livelihoods amongst ordinary citizens.

President Mugabe presided over one of the most autocratic African regimes that stood head and shoulders with the likes of current dictators like Obiang in Equatorial Guinea, Biya in Cameroon, Afewerki in Eritrea, al-Bashir in Sudan, and Museveni in Uganda.

Let's be clear: the events in Zimbabwe described above were an illegal and illegitimate transfer of power from one faction of the ruling party to another.

However, this was not the first time that the military in Zimbabwe and the so-called “securocrats” have subverted constitutional order in a way that merely entrenched un-democratic rule.

For instance, on the eve of the presidential election in March 2002 the top army generals of Zimbabwe led by then commander of the Zimbabwe Defense Forces Major-General Zvinvashe issued a public statement in which it was announced that they would never salute a leader who did not have liberation war credentials. An obvious position meant to target Morgan Tsvangirai, the leader of the democratic opposition.

In June 2008, pursuant to a victory of the MDC in the March 2008 election the military staged a pre-emptive military coup that literally prevented political opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai and the MDC from taking over, installing President Mugabe as president of the republic.

November 2017 now represents a third occasion of a revolt against the constitution, but this time, marked with the popular removal of an unpopular president.

Despite the illegalities of the November 2017 processes, Zimbabwe now has the obligation of ensuring that there’s a major shift and fundamental departure from a past of division, attrition and fear.

Zimbabwe needs a genuine break from its tortured past, not a continuation of the old order. The new Zimbabwe, to be established now, need to be founded on the values and principles of constitutionalism, the rule of law, a just and prosperous society. In the new Zimbabwe, every citizen must be free to pursue life, liberty, and happiness.

The starting point must be a return to true legitimacy, constitutionalism, and the rule of law. The roadmap to legitimacy is the fundamental precondition to the establishment of a sustainable, just, and free Zimbabwe. This roadmap must be anchored on clear benchmarks. These include:

- 1) The immediate restoration of constitutionalism, the rule of law, and legitimate civilian rule. The military must be demobilized from the streets.
- 2) Implementation of genuine electoral reforms to ensure that the election in July-August 2018 is free, fair, credible, and legitimate. Those electoral reforms, including: the preparation of a brand new biometric voters’ roll to which all political parties sign onto; agreement on an independent electoral management body; the introduction of a diaspora vote; international observation and poll monitors; defined role of the UN and its agencies; full access to media; and a safe environment for campaigning and voting free from intimidation.

- 3) Political and institutional reforms, which include aligning the country's laws with the 2013 constitution, and in particular actualizing the provisions dealing with devolution and the land question.
- 4) Major economic reforms that focus on restoring livelihoods, growing a shared economy and addressing the huge challenge of unemployment and under-development.
- 5) Restoring the social contract, including the renewal and rebirth of a new Zimbabwe that shuns corruption and promotes national healing and reconciliation.

The above road map must be guaranteed and underwritten by the international community. In this regard, the role of the African Union and the United Nations will be critical.

The new authorities must show some signs of a commitment to real transformation other than cosmetic statements on the economy.

The real danger is that they will pursue a Beijing model, in the respect of which there are nominal improvements on the economy while political space is closed and democracy is muzzled.

It is therefore important that the new authorities show signs of commitment to real change.

They could, for instance, begin by openly acknowledging and apologizing for the major human rights abuses of the past four decades, in particular the massacres in Matabeleland known as Gukurahundi, the illegal and inhumane urban land clearances of Operation Murambatsvina, and the vicious 2008 post election violence against the opposition and ordinary citizens.

They could for instance order an inquiry into the disappearance of human rights activists, including Patrick Nabanyama and Itai Dzamara, who has been missing since March 2015.

Authorities could for instance mollify many Zimbabweans by ordering a judicial inquiry into Zimbabwe's missing diamond revenues, estimated to be around \$15 billion.

We have lost a lot of time in Zimbabwe, fighting amongst ourselves. One hopes that the fresh beam of light that we saw on 18 November 2017 becomes a permanent bright shining star that shows us the path forward. Zimbabweans must fix our own country and repair the wounds of the past. But we can't do this alone.

As Zimbabwe begins this quest for transformation, it will need the support of the international community, including the United States and Congress in particular, at this crucial stage.

We ask the international community and the U.S. to keep us in your hearts. Do not allow our country to be forgotten in our battle against tyranny and poverty and for democracy and human rights. Our election requires active support and oversight from the international community, including our American friends.

Further, once we show signs of an irrevocable and irreversible trajectory towards legitimacy, democracy, and the rule of law, we shall require your full support as we re-engage key international institutions.

We know that this struggle has been long and difficult. But we are confident that we will complete what we started in 1999 when we formed the Movement for Democratic Change with the aspiration of establishing a truly democratic, just, and free Zimbabwe.

Thank you. Zikomo.