

**ZIMBABWE:**  
**HEALING, RECONCILIATION AND RECONSTRUCTION**  
Report of the Deliberative Conference  
Held at Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York. 29<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> October 2009.

Hosted by:  
The Africa Initiative of Syracuse University & S.I Newhouse School of Public Communications



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In partnership with the Newhouse School of Public Communications, The Africa Initiative of Syracuse University hosted a special three-day conference from October 29 to 31<sup>st</sup> October. This crucial meeting brought together key figures from Southern Africa and the United States to deliberate on the question of Zimbabwe's future, the role of healing in socio-political reconstruction, and the role of democratic institutions and an informed citizenry in a peace process that goes beyond partisan proclivities. This symposium was unique in many ways, not only because the meeting was held at a time when the Global Political Agreement (GPA) that brought tentative peace and stability in Zimbabwe was hanging in the balance, or that a key partner in the unity government had threatened to pull out due to alleged frustrations caused by a coalition partner.

This meeting remains unique in the sense that it aimed to create a space for Zimbabweans themselves to deliberate the present and future of their own country. By bringing together representatives of government, civil society, human rights groups, scholars and Zimbabweans in the Diaspora, the symposium provided a rare avenue through which we could assess the progress, status, challenges and opportunities for lasting peace, healing and reconstruction for the people of Zimbabwe. Among those who presented at the conference included:

- **Senator Sekai Holland.** Zimbabwean Minister for Healing and National Cohesion
- **Elinor Sisulu.** Author of *Walter and Albertina Sisulu: In Our Lifetime*.
- **Jestina Mukoko.** Peace activist and National Director, Zimbabwe Peace Project
- **Gertrude Hambira.** Head, General Agriculture and Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe
- **Thomas Deve.** Africa Policy Analyst, UN Millennium Campaign
- **Imani Countess.** Senior Director of Public Affairs, TransAfrica Forum

From the United States there were presenters that included, Esau Mavindidze, Imani Countess of the Washington DC-based TransAfrica Forum, Briggs Bomba of Africa Action (also in Washington, DC), Lavinia Hall of Rutgers University, Erin McCandless, of The New School and Timothy Scarnecchia of Kent State University.

The Symposium began with a solidarity luncheon with the workers of Syracuse University. Among those invited were Adjuncts United, SEIU Local 200United, and Teamsters, Local 317. Gertrude Hambira of the General Agricultural and Plantation Workers' Union of Zimbabwe (GAPWUZ) spoke on the struggles of the workers in Zimbabwe, particularly in the aftermath of evictions and social dislocations that have characterized the land redistribution process in Zimbabwe. John Burdick of the Faculty-Labor Fairness Coalition presented the group's a solidarity message to the workers of Zimbabwe, noting particularly that they feel inspired by the latter's struggles. The symposium then continued in the Herg Auditorium of the Newhouse School, with a reception hosted by Lorraine Branham, the Dean of Newhouse School of Communications. In her opening and welcoming remarks to participants and guests, Dean Lorraine Branham the noted the centrality of a free and unbiased media in advancing the pursuit of justice and in stemming impunity. In addition to expressing solidarity with the visitors and representatives of agricultural farm workers, human rights activists, and political and social organizations in Zimbabwe, she also encouragement them in their cause in the pursuit of a just and fair society.

The program included a special breakfast panel on *Gender and Violence in Southern Africa*. This well-attended forum was co-moderated by Dr Deborah Pellow and Dr Lavinia Hall from Syracuse and Rutgers Universities respectively. The Friday schedule also included a special discussion on xenophobic violence against Zimbabweans in South Africa. This project included a video-conference session (via the Global Collaboratory at the Maxwell School) previously done between Syracuse University Anthropology students and victims of xenophobic violence in South Africa. For complete Program of events, please see Conference Program (attached).

Consistent with Syracuse University's ongoing commitment to *Scholarship in Action*, and the Africa Initiative's mission of providing space for constructive discourse on Africa and African peoples, the third day of the symposium was dedicated to the Syracuse community to interact with those at the center of the struggle for peace and dignity in Zimbabwe, and to have a meaningful conversation that transcends the often oversimplified analyses and notions of violence in popular corporate media. This special Community event co-sponsored by the Pan African Community of Central New York (PACCNY) was held on Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2009 at the Warehouse Auditorium in Downtown Syracuse and included Pan African cuisine.

## **Reflection on Specific Proceedings and Outcomes of the Conference**

Participants and the organizers believe that this deliberative conference on the healing process in Zimbabwe was a great success for the following reasons:

1. While the conference was organized in an academic setting, the planning and execution allowed for deliberate and focused reports and discussion which highlighted the ground conditions, ground responses, and the ways in which the regional and global community has been intervening to bring about the processes of healing, reconciliation and reconstruction in Zimbabwe. This approach was reinforced by the balance between academic and non-academic professionals,
2. This conference was an important aspect of the critical intervention which became necessary as a result of the deteriorated social, economic and political climate in Zimbabwe. It served to open new spaces for debate and discussion necessary in reinforcing the emerging process of rebirth in the country. In this light, the conference received reports on the situation in Zimbabwe and the struggles of its people to foster a society based on respect for the equal right of all the citizens, and equal right national wealth and resources. Such spaces for debate and discussion are especially necessary because Zimbabweans unlike their counterparts in South Africa have had to combine their post colonial with their anti neo-colonial phase of development. Subsequently, the post-independence phase has been dominated by the questions of:
  - how to address the issues of historical and structural inequalities located in the land problem.
  - how to address the issue of gender-based oppression and patriarchal social norms
  - how to address the issue of racial and ethnic chauvinism
  - how to address the rise in violence, especially against women, the poor, political opponents, immigrant workers, and violence against white plantation farmers
  - how to address the growth of corruption now evident in the state, in the security forces; corruption which is seeping into the fabric of the culture.

The underlying current that guided the debates and discussion was the historical and structural problems which confront the society, such as the issues of oppression and

exploitation based on race, gender, and entitlements organized around the land question. The confluence between the land, the ethnic, the gender and the national questions and the response of the post-independence government to these issues formed the basis and was the entry point within which the reports from the ground and the discussion at the conference took place. There was the stress from the symposium that a new land audit was necessary to ensure that in spite of the process of redistribution, reclamation or any other intervention deemed necessary, it is important that land remained in productive use to feed the people and support the national economy.

3. From the background of these monumental issues which confront the country today, the conference examined the role of the global economy. Special attention was placed on the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) implemented in Zimbabwe in the period of transition from minority to majority rule. It was felt that the land question, the ethnic question, the gender question cannot be divorced from the manner in which neo-liberal approaches served to counteract and limit the possibilities for the creation of a just society based on an equitable formula for redistributing land. It was also reinforced that the neo-liberal focus on stock exchanges and old-fashioned mining conditions do not provide an alternative to the past forms of economic exploitation
4. Those who took this approach, in particular Briggs Bomba and Thomas Deve felt that enough emphasis is not placed on the ways in which restructuring at the global level influences and pushes decision making at the local level Many participants drew attention to the fact that the economic recession at the global level imposed greater hardships on the poor and heightened exploitation. There was also a vigorous discussion on the ways in which deregulation and liberalization contributed to the deepening of national corruption which has consumed the state, the security forces, state officials, and politicians. From this background, an important thread that emerged to guide the discussion around issues of healing and reconstruction was the endemic presence of a corrupt state structure, and its involvement in violence, especially since this state which must bear responsibility for the forced removal of the poor, chaos, for famine, and for violence continues to maintain relative control in the country.
5. From the background of the tentative peace that resulted from the formation of the inclusive government, emanating from the Global Political Agreement (GPA),

conference participants received and discussed reports of the human rights situation, the problem of food security, the challenge of tangible and progressive land reform, the crisis of unemployment crisis, the condition of the farm workers and the reduction in the number of farm workers resulting from the forced take-over of farms. Based on the discussions which ensued on these issues the following areas of consensus emerged, in the form of issues which need to be addressed

- What to do about violence against the person. Should the society turn a new leaf without addressing the matter of crimes against the person?
  - From the human rights standpoint, and this was ably addressed by Elinor Sisulu, the society cannot move forward, healing cannot begin without justice for those who have suffered at the hands of corrupt officials and the security forces. Healing, reconciliation and reconstruction can only begin if and when the society recognizes wrongs, finds solutions to address past and current crimes, and forges a path towards respect for the human rights of all its citizens
  - How to create equitable land redistribution to allow Black, White, the upper and lower classes, and male and female to participate in the economic future of Zimbabwe. Having recognized that 'Land Reform' is yet to take place, conference participants in particular Minister Sekai Holland and Leader of the Farm Workers Union Gertrude Hambira presented scenarios for the furtherance of the discussion on this matter. Both leaders recognized the importance of a just and equitable land reform in the forward movement of Zimbabwe. Minister Holland outlined the approach that the non-ministerial body, the organ which has been established by the joint government will in the near future make pronouncements on, namely how to proceed on land reform. She explained that one basis for forward movement is located in the demands and program for Land Reform as outlined in the platform of the MDC. On the other hand Gertrude Hambira and the farm workers union which she represents is calling for land to the landless, i.e. a reform process that includes setting aside land adjoining large landed estates for the creation of villages. Such villages would feature the growth of subsistence agricultural communities which inevitably would supplement the household income of the farm worker.
6. The role of the Zimbabwe Diaspora in the process of healing and reconstruction was stressed. Esau Mavindidze made a presentation on the pivotal role of the more than

4 million Zimbabweans in the reconstruction process. Drawing attention to the importance of remittances in the society, Mavindidze noted that the Zimbabwean Diaspora had to take cognizance of the fact that they were an important constituency in the reconstruction of Zimbabwe. Diaspora communities, organizations and activists had to be networked to create conditions to effectively engage the home country politically and in other areas of reconstructions such as knowledge transfer, business creation and the promotion of knowledge intensive Foreign Direct Investment.

7. Also noted was the fact that *brain drain* was a key component of the overall character of human flight from Zimbabwe since a significant percentage of those who left are professionals and skilled people. This crippling flight of some of the country's best brains has escalated to levels that have serious implications for the reconstruction of Zimbabwe since there is currently no coordinated effort for these expatriates to fruitfully participate in the process. The conference noted that the human capital available in the Diaspora concerns the level of education, training, skills and knowledge that might be drawn on for the home-country's reconstruction initiatives. The following observations and recommendations were made:

- a. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and other Knowledge Management (KM) techniques if utilized appropriately can enhance the potential role of the Diaspora as meaningful change agents in the social, cultural and intellectual aspects of Zimbabwe
- b. Advancement in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has rendered geography irrelevant. As a result Zimbabwean skilled personnel scattered throughout the world can develop common agenda even across large geographical distances, making it easier for them to become involved in the reconstruction process in Zimbabwe
- c. There are greater possibilities for engagement, including increased foreign direct investment, creation of web-based professional, social, and political networks, and advocacy initiatives
- d. The task is to create professional associations coordinated within well thought out ICT platforms that can channel programs that match the needs in human capital in the home country with the supply of Diaspora skills

- e. Engagement with the society at all levels will be easier when the Diaspora has organized itself. On its part, the emerging progressive leadership must come up with a comprehensive policy framework based on the assumption that without any support and incentives, the skills available in the Diasporas can not, and will not be transferred to Zimbabwe
  - f. This level of engagement will keep the Diaspora focused enough on Zimbabwe to play constructive role as equal citizens, make them relevant and thus create bridges for the possibilities of moving back to the homeland
8. Coordinating advocacy with information and legislation. Imani Countess of TransAfrica Forum outlined the efforts being undertaken by TransAfrica to educate the public in the United States on the current state of the peoples of Zimbabwe. The historical role of TransAfrica in working with the legislators on Capitol Hill was outlined, especially in relation to the current legislative initiatives being considered under the leadership of the Congressional Black Caucus
9. While much was achieved by this conference, it was also agreed that this should be seen as a beginning, a critical impetus for greater action needed to support and help the GPA and people of Zimbabwe as they approach a new phase. Follow-up is required to address the broad areas of consensus that emerged in Syracuse. Specialized conferences and discussion involving all stakeholders should be attempted. The broad areas for these conferences could be: Land Reform for the Twenty First Century; How will Reform produce healing and integrate Zimbabwe into a new global economy; Democratic Reform for Zimbabwe; The role of indigenous knowledge and culture in fostering democracy and democratic institutions in Zimbabwe; UBUNTU and the Human Spirit; The meaning of freedom and human rights for development.