

12-23 FEBRUARY 2024



# VOICES OF HOPE NEWSLETTER



Zimbabwe Council of Churches

# Zimbabwe: A Nation in Despair

By Shamiso Saburi



“Zimbabwe is nation in despair with the majority of the people who had hoped that things were going to change post-August 23, 2023, harmonised elections but alas things are far much worse than what we anticipated,” said the Zimbabwe Council of Churches General Secretary, Rev Wilfred Dimingu during the recently held Church CSO meeting that was held at Kentucky Hotel in the capital.

Rev. Dimingu asserts that most people in the country had hoped since 1980 that their fortunes were going to be changed through the ballot box, but that hope has always been shuttered as the elections produce contested results for over decades now.

“The August 2023 elections were a process in which we hoped that God would improve our lives. However, looking at the process itself, including the late opening of polling stations, and the election extending to the 24th of August, it didn’t go as we had hoped. After the election, issues of illegitimacy, the shrinking of civic space, and the meaning of the enactment of the Patriotic Bill which was enacted into law just before the elections emerged. These factors weakened the role and power of civil society organizations in the just-ended elections,” he said.

Rev. Dimingu also highlighted the emasculation of the voices of the people, especially through the recalls by the self-claimed Citizen Coalition for Change (CCC) Interim Secretary General Sengezo Tshabangu, which reversed the limited gains of the democratic process where several elected Members of Parliament and Councilors were dismissed from office in a score-settling scuffle within the CCC. This has led to the continued deterioration of essential services as it has plunged the nation into perpetual election mode for over a year.

“The political uncertainties and the continuous economic breakdown have led the country to lose many skilled personnel in search for greener pastures to the UK and other countries. This situation paints a bleak picture for the citizens of Zimbabwe,” he added.

Members from various Civil Society Organizations called for unity between them and the Church in addressing the pertinent issues that are affecting the people amidst the unfriendly environment they are operating.

“We are in a chaotic situation where authorities can simply neglect their mandate. Currently, there is nothing holding authorities accountable. It is high time we file a case through the court system to make it clear to authorities that they cannot simply wake up and do whatever they want with the electorate,” Vera Musara said.

The meeting produced a plethora of action points, including:

- Strategic litigation against responsible authorities and collective strategic engagements with the authorities and the Ministry responsible for regulating CSOs and local authorities to address the closure of civic space.
- Revisiting the Sabbath Call proposed by the Church in 2017 and its provisions to address political polarization and failed democratic processes.
- Adding the voice of CSOs and the Church to the legitimacy question.
- Conducting robust civic education to hold Members of Parliament and local authorities accountable to the electorate.
- Conducting strategic dialogues on the economy.

Various speakers called upon the Church and CSOs to come out in the open and stand with one voice against the challenges faced by the nation. The meeting provided a platform for reflection and analysis of Zimbabwe’s political, social, and economic context.

The Church continues to defend the exploited, stand for human rights, and protect the dignity of the disadvantaged.



# The Spirit of Nation-building

By Rev Dr Kenneth Mtata



The nations in the bible are separated from us by thousands of years. Yet, some of the biblical stories can enlighten us in areas of life that affect us today. One such area is that of building a nation.

1 Kings 11:26-40 describes how Jeroboam, a very capable servant of Solomon, rebelled against Solomon. God promised Jeroboam, through the prophet Ahijah, that he would become king over ten of the twelve tribes of Israel. When Solomon died, as the last king of the united kingdoms of the twelve tribes, Jeroboam fought against Rehoboam, Solomon's chosen successor. This led to the permanent division of the twelve tribes. Are there lessons for us in such narratives for nation-building? Yes, there are some interesting features. Let's pick a few.

## 1. Leadership succession

The transition of power from Solomon to Jeroboam highlights the importance of stable leadership succession in nation-building. Jeroboam felt entitled because he was "very able, and... industrious" (verse 28). Although Solomon appointed Jeroboam into leadership, he was uncomfortable with him. Was it a case of a leader insecure because his subordinate is more able than him? Whatever the reason, Solomon sought to kill Jeroboam. Jeroboam fled to Egypt.

Nation-building rises and falls on leadership succession. Leadership succession must be based on merit and not other nepotistic criteria. Leaders must feel comfortable with their able followers. A Capable leader is known for the stability they leave behind after their time on Earth is up. To achieve such stability, they must manage their exit well.

## 2. Divine intervention

One of the most contentious subjects in highly religious nations like ours is the place of God or the divine in nation-building. While God endorsed Jeroboam as leader, God only did so conditionally. God said, "I will take you, and you shall reign over all that your soul desires; you shall be king over Israel. <sup>38</sup> If you will listen to all that I command you, walk in my ways, and do what is right in my sight by keeping my statutes and my commandments..."

(v.37ff). God endorses everyone who desires leadership roles, as long as their ambition and actions are consistent with God's commitment to the welfare of God's people. No one is predestined to lead. The predestination of leadership can only be claimed in retrospect or in the aftermath. Nations are built by people who fear God and have deep regard for God's people.

## 3. Political turmoil

Nation-building can sometimes prevent the rise of tyranny or oppressive people. Other times, it can help prevent anarchy or chaos. It is better to invest in nation-building to prevent chaos because sometimes the results of chaos can last for a very long time. In the case of the twelve tribes, they were permanently divided. We have seen many countries implode into perpetual chaos because not enough work was done during peace times to build the foundations of unity, peace, justice, and shared prosperity. Leaders who do not invest in nation-building tend to leave a legacy of political instability, bloodshed, and poverty.

## 4. Exile and return

One recurring feature in the bible is the reality of exile or diaspora. Sometimes, people left the Holy Land to flee persecution, like Jeroboam. Other times, they were taken as hostages into exile by conquering nations. Whatever the reason, those in exile always remained a resource for the land. Some of them, like Jeroboam, came back to lead. Some of them brought in wealth to enrich the nation. Nation-building requires harnessing the gifts of human resources of those at home and those in the diaspora.

Our nation now has more than a quarter of its population living in other countries. Diaspora remittances or money sent home by people in foreign lands is more than 1 billion US dollars. This makes up 16% of the country's total foreign currency receipts. This makes Zimbabweans in the diaspora the second contributor to the economy after exports. These remittances sustain families and the economy. The agenda for nation-building must take into serious consideration its population in the diaspora.

May God awaken in us the spirit of building our nation by raising new leaders, blessing our succession politics, giving us peace, and blessing the children of our land scattered on the face of the earth.

I urge you to join up with a few people you trust so that together, you can pray and deliberate on the agenda of nation-building.

Prayer

Unless you God build the house, those who build it labor in vain.

Unless you God guard the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.

Be with us now as we build and watch over our nation. In Jesus' name, we pray. AMEN

## The Salvation Army: Model of Sustainability in Churches

*By Major Sydney Barson, The Salvation Army Communications Officer*



In a bid to promote sustainability and economic empowerment within churches, the Salvation Army has set a shining example for other member churches of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) to follow. This initiative was highlighted by the ZCC General Secretary, Rev Wilfred Dimingu, during a recent event at the Officer Training College in Harare.

Rev Dimingu commended the Salvation Army for their forward-thinking approach in opening the Enterprise Hotel in Bulawayo, which he described as a sustainable achievement that should be emulated by other Churches. He experienced the hospitality of the hotel during a business trip to the city, further solidifying his praise for the initiative.

The ZCC's leadership and secretariat also demonstrated their commitment to supporting Church projects by convening at Masiye Camp in December 2022 for an end-of-year reflection.

During the farewell event for outgoing Territorial Leaders Commissioners Wayne and Deborah Bungay, Rev Dimingu expressed his admiration for Commissioner Bungay's support of sustainable business ideas for the growth of the Church. He said: "The presence of The Salvation Army under your leadership has played a very big role in the ecumenical Church of this country."

"The contribution of The Salvation Army in the health and education sector of Zimbabwe has continued to make the presence of the Church felt in uplifting the lives of the ordinary vulnerable people in this country," he added.

The Salvation Army's membership in the Zimbabwe Council of Churches serves as a testament to their dedication to community development and sustainability.

# Theologians urge the Church to be the Salt and Light in Zimbabwe

By *Reginald Ngwenya*



Prominent theologians challenged the church to be active and have an effective presence in society as well as develop theological reflections that relate to the prevailing context especially when the country is facing a massive exodus of its citizenry due to an array of challenges that include political and economic turmoil.

Speaking at the recently held reflection meeting on the prevailing context, former Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) General Secretary, Reverend Doctor Kenneth Mtata, and the ZCC Theological Commission member, Rev. S. De Wolf called upon the church to be the salt and light of the world as it takes the leading role in addressing the challenges faced by Zimbabweans.

In his reflections, Rev. Mtata gave three possible facets of the church which include passive, ineffective and active.

“The church can either be passive, where it is present but ineffective. The church can also be present and remain ineffective and this is where the church makes statements and takes actions that have no transformative impact in society. The third scenario is a church that has an active and effective presence in society -being the ‘salt and the light’ to the world” he said.

Rev Mtata urged the Church to be united in addressing a common agenda bewildering the nation. He further implored the Church not to be fragmented or be taken aback by the side shows created by the politicians meant to render the real church ineffective.

Reverend De Wolf building from the reflection by Rev Mtata emphasized the need for the Church to challenge the authorities without fear concerning the problems being faced by the country. She echoed the thought that the Church is preaching to a society that now has been suffering from skepticism and has lost faith in everything.

“The church needs to create a rigorous theology of ‘our day.’ The Theology must make us bold enough to challenge injustices rather than ignore them and must inculcate active innovative thoughts”, she said.

Since the turn of the millennium, Zimbabweans have been subjected to numerous challenges which include socio-political turmoil and economic meltdown. The church has been fragmented in addressing these problems with some sections like Pastors4ED sanitizing the government's brutalities at the expense of the general citizenry.

# Evictions Crisis: Church Urges Government to Address Humanitarian Needs

*By Davison Marenga*

Recent developments in Zimbabwe have brought to light a dire situation affecting hundreds of families across the country as reports of evictions and demolitions, mostly in rural areas, surfaced leading to arrests and sentencing of several traditional leaders (Dema and Nyamandlovu) and ‘illegally settled’ families sending shockwaves through the affected communities.

The most affected areas are Gutu, Nemamwa, Mushandike, and Gwanda, and rumors of impending demolitions in Chipinge, Domboshava, and Dema, leaving many wondering if the Kwangu/Ngakwami Presidential Title Deeds Scheme was nothing but a political gimmick meant to garner support for the ruling party during the August 2023 harmonized elections.

Speaking in parliament recently, Justice Minister Ziyambi Ziyambi highlighted that, a total of 3 775 illegal settlers have been arrested for occupying gazetted land in ZRP’s blitz code-named ‘Operation No Land Barons and Illegal Settlements’ that started in January this year and 985 have been convicted with 3 360 cases pending trial across the country.

The evictions have left many families homeless, with some having lived in these areas for over two decades. This has led to a humanitarian crisis, especially impacting women and children who are now facing increased vulnerability. In some instances, the girl child has fallen victim to exploitation by individuals taking advantage of the chaos caused by the evictions.

Speaking during the recently held Context Analysis Meeting, Rev. Sozaepi said the evictions have posed a sad picture as the now homeless girls are now being taken advantage of by older men at Nemamwa Growth Point.

“There is an increase in cases of promiscuity at Nemamwa Growth Point as local men are preying on the young girls who have fallen victim to the evictions,” he said.

The looming drought exacerbates the situation, which has forced many families to abandon their crops as they grapple with displacement.

The Church has called on the government to consider the humanitarian needs of the affected families as some had settled in these areas for over two decades and are now homeless overnight. The Church urged the authorities to address this crisis with compassion and urgency, ensuring that those displaced are provided with adequate support and assistance during this perilous time.



# ZCC to publish the post-election situation report

By Romeo Gohwa



“We believe that democracy is not just about elections, but about ensuring that the voices of all citizens are heard and that their rights and needs are respected.” Said Mr Mhalnga.

The post-election survey is an important milestone in the ongoing dialogue about the future of Zimbabwe. As the country looks to move forward, the opinions and concerns of ordinary citizens must continue to be heard and addressed

The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) prepares to publish the findings of the post-election situation report this February. The report examines the post-election period after the August Harmonised elections, and the findings are expected to shed light on the opinions and experiences of voters across the country.

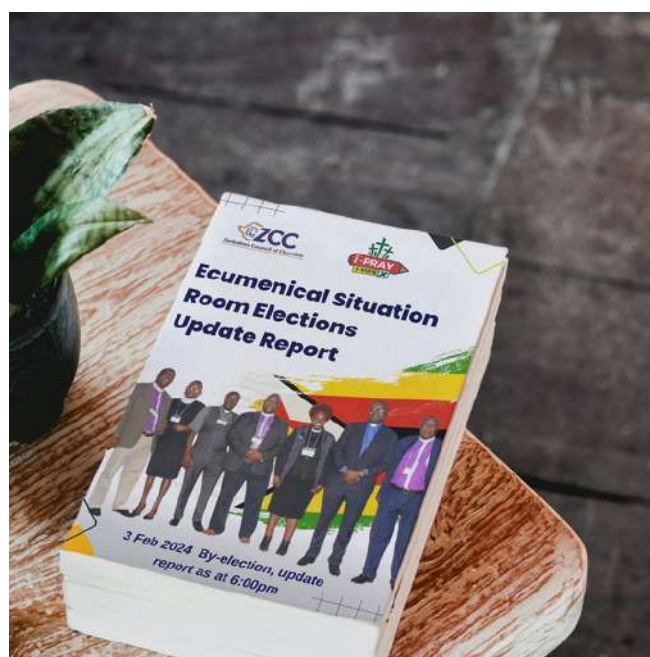


According to the survey, the environment during the election was perceived as calm and peaceful by most respondents, although a significant minority felt it was tense due to the late opening of some polling stations in urban areas. The report emphasized the need for comprehensive and effective voter education campaigns to address the challenges faced in voter registration. Clear and accessible information on voter registration processes, requirements, and locations should be disseminated widely to ensure that all eligible citizens have the opportunity to participate in future elections.

The report highlights the importance of sufficient resources to facilitate smooth and efficient elections. This includes ensuring adequate and timely distribution of ballot papers and addressing issues related to late openings of polling stations.

Furthermore, the report calls for swift and decisive action to address any instances of post-election violence. It emphasizes the need for thorough investigations into reported cases, and for perpetrators to be held accountable. The promotion of a peaceful and inclusive political environment should be a priority to maintain social cohesion.

ZCC Elections officer Mr Joshua Mhalnga, indicated that he is hopeful that the survey will help to inform and guide the efforts of all those working towards a better Zimbabwe.



# Presidential Third-Term Bid: Fears for Constitutional Amendments Loom

By Davison Marenga



In a surprising but widely feared turn of events, barely a month after attaining a two-thirds majority in Parliament youths in Masvingo led by their Provincial Chairman Robson Mavhenyengwa are clamoring for the incumbent President E.D Mnangagwa to rule beyond 2028 which is his second and final term according to the country's constitution.

The show of support was evident during some events that happened in Masvingo recently including during the National Youth Day celebrations on February 21, Mushagashe Vocational Training Centre where the slogan vaMnangagwa 2030 vanenge vachipo was chanted.

The slogan “2030 vaMnangagwa vanenge vachipo” loosely translated to “In 2030 Mnangagwa will still be in power” is seen as a call to urge President Mnangagwa to extend his term of Office beyond the constitution stipulated two term limit.

Speaking at the same event at Mushagashe Vocational Training Centre, Vice President Kembo Mohadi questioned why ZANU-PF supporters were saying Mnangagwa would still be president in 2030 as if there were any indications he would not be in office.

These further cements the speculations that ZANU-PF is on the move to amend the current constitution as it now has a two-thirds majority in parliament after winning majority of the seats that were won by the opposition Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) in August 2023, after a spate of by-elections in December 2023 and February 2024. The seats feel vacant after the CCC self-claimed Interim Secretary-General recalled more than 10 MPs from parliament.

Meanwhile, the opposition is grappling with internal factionalism, leaving them unable to effectively challenge the status quo and the country might watch as the annihilation of the constitution ensues.

As tensions might arise and political dynamics shift, all eyes are on the future of Zimbabwe and how these recent events will shape its political landscape.



# The plight of rural women in Climate Change

*By Josephine Munhape*

What exactly does ‘Climate Change’ mean? People have been discussing climate change for decades, but believe me, the scientific lingo may be bewildering even to experts. We are now talking about ‘just energy transition’, and this technical terminology continues to pop up.

After attending a dialogue that explored the aftermath of COP 28 from a gendered perspective, I was left wondering if we completely comprehend how deeply Climate Change is affecting the way we live in basic terms.

Whose voices do the elites represent when they stand on those elite podiums discussing climate change? Are the people they represent completely aware of what is going on, and how can their opinions be heard on such prestigious platforms?

Women from Binga, Chipinge, Zvishavane, Mt Darwin, and Mwenezi attended the Amplifying Women’s Voices in Climate Action: Women’s Reflection from COP-28, and as they shared their experiences, I could see the dynamic impact it had on these women. Living their experiences through their narration made me shudder and realize how climate change has altered life on an individual and family level as we knew it.

From their shared experiences, it was heartbreaking to see the rippling effects of climate change and how they had even shattered the social fabric and bonds of the community. Children are marrying at a young age owing to starvation, men have become so shameless as to regard them as easy ‘prey’, armed robberies in fisheries are on the rise, and societal morale has entirely collapsed. In Mwenezi children no longer attend classes fully because of hunger. A woman from Binga stated that because of severe food shortages, “Kuguta kuri mupfungwa” meaning “satiation, is now a matter of the mindset”



And I wondered if this is where things have gotten. She added that human-wildlife conflicts have escalated, noting that because there are no grazing areas in the forest, these animals' only hope is their homesteads.

Gender-based violence, including femicides, has ravaged families as they compete for financial resources to feed their children. The traditional family structure has been drastically altered.

“Men are remotely controlling the family, which is not a very good thing to keep a healthy family”

One lady remarked that men leave their families for diaspora employment, but the impact is still felt by rural women who stay behind to help keep the family together.

Listening to the women narrate their stories made me wonder if the COP was conveying the issues as they were explained on this platform. How best can these women’s issues be incorporated as we join hands in the ‘Climate Action’? What does ‘Just energy transition’ mean to a fellow woman in Binga, Chipinge, Mwenezi, Mt Darwin, etc.?

Let’s talk, feel free to contact me in the provided contact details. It’s Chao for now.

# Global Warming

*By Angela Taropafadzwa Chaerera, ECD B, Warren Day Nursery and Junior School, Waterfalls.*



The sands of time have rendered fear;  
Blue skies up above are no longer clear;  
Stars were bright when they came,  
But now deem, obscured with pollution.  
Forests were evergreen, beautiful,  
but now only black grounds are in sight for the soul;  
Oh, Global Warming,  
The world is crying.

**ENVIRONMENT CORNER**

# FOR JUST AND PEACEFUL SOCIETIES

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