

## Letter by Morgan Tsvangirai to John Howard: February 17 2003

The Right Honourable John Howard,

Prime Minister of Australia.

I have been alerted to the contents of General Olusegun Obasanjo's letter to you, in which he clearly indicates that he is stating the agreed positions between himself and Mr. Thabo Mbeki regarding the crisis of legitimacy and governance in Zimbabwe.

These agreed positions, as expressed in General Obasanjo's letter to you are nothing but essentially a brief from the propaganda arm of the Mugabe regime, and should therefore be dismissed by the Commonwealth and the rest of the international community with utmost contempt. They represent the disreputable endgame of a long-term Obasanjo-Mbeki strategy designed to infiltrate and subvert not only the Commonwealth effort but, indeed, all other international efforts intended to rein in Mugabe's violent and illegitimate regime. Therefore, their current effort to unilaterally retire the mandate of the Commonwealth Troika, thereby scuttling a multilateral effort to resolve the Zimbabwe crisis must be seen in the context of this broad nefarious strategy.

Through this diabolical act of fellowship and solidarity with a murderous dictatorship, General Obasanjo and Mr. Mbeki have now openly joined Mugabe as he continues to wage a relentless war against the people of Zimbabwe. They are now self-confessed fellow travellers on a road littered with violence, destruction and death.

Zimbabwe was suspended from the Councils of the Commonwealth because of the Mugabe regime's blatant refusal to hold a free and fair election and the lifting of that suspension is contingent upon the extent to which the issues raised by the Commonwealth are successfully addressed. The Mugabe regime therefore remains an illegitimate regime until it implements concrete and irrevocable steps to return to legitimacy.

However, since the fraudulent March 2002 presidential poll, the Mugabe regime has done absolutely nothing to dismantle the infrastructure of tyranny upon which its rulership is based. If anything, Mugabe and his associates have actually consolidated dictatorial rule to the point whereby violent autocracy has become the guiding political philosophy. The rule of law remains effectively subverted; law enforcement continues to be selective and heavily politicised; persistent violations of human rights is still a central instrument of governance; the torture of political opponents has been intensified; ZANU PF political militias and the so-called "war veterans" continue to maraud the country perpetrating untold atrocities on a defenceless population; democratic space has been effectively shrunk and the general militarization of the political process has made it virtually impossible for the political opposition to conduct normal or legitimate political activity.

The Public Order and Security Act (POSA) continues to criminalize all opposition political activity and MDC political meetings are routinely banned. Through POSA freedom of speech, assembly and association, which are basic rights in a normal democratic political dispensation, are severely curtailed. The Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) continues to gag freedom of the press and guarantees the Mugabe regime free rein to monopolize and abuse the public media. The cosmetic changes that General Obasanjo refers to in his infamous letter to you are totally irrelevant. The basic fact is that there is no place in any democratic society for such inhuman and draconian pieces of legislation as POSA and AIPPA. These must be repealed immediately as a first step towards returning the country to legitimate governance.

Civil society activists are frequently brutalised and imprisoned; MDC political activists continue to be routinely murdered and the arrest and torture of the MDC leaders and parliamentarians has been intensified. General Obasanjo in his letter to you confirms that one of the MDC MPs, Honourable Job Sikhala was falsely arrested, imprisoned and tortured by the police. Mugabe himself admitted as much. Torture is recognised internationally through the relevant covenant of the United Nations as a crime against humanity and for General Obasanjo and Mr. Mbeki to equivocate on such grave matters lowers the bar of common decency expected of holders of such esteemed public offices as they hold. The alleged commitment by Mugabe to investigate and bring to book the torturers of Honourable Job Sikhala must not fool anyone. Hundreds of Zimbabweans have fallen victim to torture at the hands of the police, the secret service and the army with the blessing of Mugabe and ZANU PF and not a single torturer has been held accountable. Torture in Zimbabwe is an indispensable aspect of tyrannical rule. It defines the essence of Mugabe's dictatorship.

Since January 2003, over ten (10) MDC legislators have harassed, arrested, brutalised and tortured and this has periodically received international media attention. The list of the transgressions by the Mugabe regime is endless and continues to be meticulously elaborated on a daily basis.

These pillars of tyranny are a clear violation of the Harare Commonwealth Declaration and they constitute the basis upon which the Commonwealth successfully indicted the Mugabe regime, through the report of the Commonwealth Observer Mission to the March 2002 fraudulent presidential poll. In this context, the mandate of the troika was to monitor the situation on the ground in Zimbabwe and establish the extent to which the Mugabe regime was prepared to embrace the basic tenets of democracy and good governance. Tragically, the situation has deteriorated and the Zimbabwe crisis has assumed even more dangerous and explosive levels. It is therefore absolutely callous, disgraceful and dishonest for General Obasanjo and Mr. Mbeki to try to falsify the political facts on the ground in a vain attempt to beguile the Commonwealth and the world to surrender to the Mugabe dictatorship. Clearly, the Mugabe regime remains an illegitimate regime, notwithstanding General Obasanjo's and Mr. Mbeki's determination to deceive the world in a diabolical attempt to sanitize tyranny.

With the active assistance and connivance of General Obasanjo and Mr. Mbeki the Mugabe regime has been deliberately delinquent in its discharge of its expected responsibilities in the context of the troika mandate. The regime has flatly refused to engage or allow the Commonwealth Secretary General to visit Zimbabwe as part of an ongoing dialogue and monitoring process to resolve the crisis. Thus General Obasanjo and Mr. Mbeki assisted Mugabe to cripple the operations of the office of the Secretary General of the Commonwealth thereby rendering it ineffective in the discharge of its troika duties.

Mr. Prime Minister, Heads of State are not expected to behave in such a despicable and dishonourable way in the conduct of public affairs.

The shameful record of General Obasanjo and Mr. Mbeki in their unconditional support for the Mugabe's dictatorship is now a matter of public record. It is now quite clear that from the very beginning of the troika process General Obasanjo and Mr. Mbeki never accepted or subscribed to the Commonwealth mandate conferred on the troika. Both the Nigerian and South African Observer Missions to the fraudulent 2002 presidential poll endorsed the violent electoral methods of the Mugabe regime which were roundly condemned not only by the Commonwealth and the rest of the international community, but also the SADC Parliamentary Forum Observer Mission, whose evaluation was guided by the SADC Protocol on the conduct of elections to which both South Africa and Zimbabwe are voluntary signatories. Mr. Mbeki even went further and sought the support of the ANC-dominated South African Parliament to validate Mugabe's fraudulent poll. These acts of validating an openly illegitimate regime are a clear indication of the duplicity of General Obasanjo and Mr. Mbeki. They accepted to serve in the troika even though the mandate of the troika is clearly at variance with their declared political positions of fellowship with the Mugabe dictatorship. This was unequivocally a vile strategy to subvert the mandate and operations of the troika and cast a regime of ordinary

thieves and criminals in a deceptive form, thereby winning it a mantle of international recognition. In pursuit of this strategy, General Obasanjo and Mr. Mbeki have blunted all well-meaning international efforts to bring the Mugabe regime to account for its evil rule.

Since the fraudulent 2002 presidential poll the Mugabe regime has totally refused to abandon its violent methods of political campaigning. All the by-elections held since the presidential poll, e.g. Bikita West, Hurungwe, Marondera West, Insiza etc., have been characterised by sustained regimes of violence, destruction and death. In addition the September 2002 local government elections were conducted in the context of so much state-sponsored violence that it was virtually impossible for the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) to field candidates. Already, political campaigning for the by-elections in the Harare constituencies of Kuwadzana and Highfields, scheduled for 28 and 29 March 2003 have seen the Mugabe regime installing an elaborate infrastructure of violence anchored in the use of the army, the police and the secret service for political purposes. Food is being distributed selectively in order to punish suspected supporters of the MDC through food denial. Militia bases have already been set up in the two constituencies and with all these preparations the level of urban political violence is going to surpass all previous unpleasant experiences.

The Mugabe regime is therefore actively consolidating dictatorial rule as a form of governance and an enduring political culture. This is the kind of political culture that is going to determine the outcome of all future elections, starting with the remainder of the local government elections scheduled for August/September 2003; the remainder of the parliamentary by-elections and the normal constitutionally mandated parliamentary elections scheduled for 2005. Unless and until the Mugabe regime abandons this political culture of tyranny and violence the Commonwealth and the international community must not be deceived by General Obasanjo and Mr. Mbeki into letting a murderous illegitimate regime off the hook. Pressure must continue to be piled on Mugabe and his cronies until they realize and admit that the international community will grant them neither the temptation nor the opportunity to continue to perpetrate crimes against the people of Zimbabwe.

Contrary to the positions of ZANU PF so eloquently parroted by General Obasanjo in his letter to you, the Zimbabwe crisis has never been about land. To all well-meaning Zimbabweans, an equitable, sustainable and growth oriented land reform and redistribution programme has never been a contested issue. What is at issue are the violent and unsustainable methods employed by ZANU PF and which have reduced a once vibrant and highly productive agricultural sector to a wasteland, threatening over half of the population with chronic poverty and starvation in the process. Thousands of people who were given the hastily parcelled out unsustainable pieces of land have either not taken them up because of the absence of vital agricultural support services or they have failed to make them productive because the corrupt and bankrupt Mugabe regime lacks the resources to establish new viable and productive agricultural communities. As a result, Zimbabwe will continue to hold out the begging bowl for food from the international community throughout 2003 and beyond.

The fate of the displaced farm workers remains a tragic one. These are largely third and fourth generation Zimbabwean citizens of Mozambican, Malawian and Zambian origin, who acquired citizenship long before Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. Because they were suspected to have voted for the MDC during the June 2000 parliamentary elections, they were stripped of their citizenship through an amendment of the Citizenship Act just before the fraudulent March 2002 presidential poll. This effectively rendered them stateless and thereby disenfranchised them. The treatment meted out to these citizens of Zimbabwe has no parallel in the annals of history outside the evil schemes of Adolf Hitler against the Jews in the Third Reich. The proposed restoration of citizenship rights to this group of Zimbabweans touted about in General Obasanjo's letter is nothing but a ruse designed to falsely portray the Mugabe dictatorship as a reformist government.

It is totally false that the chaotic and unsustainable land redistribution programme carried out by ZANU PF for purely political reasons has generated jobs that have absorbed a substantial proportion of these citizens. They remain starving and diseased communities along

Zimbabwe's highways where they were dumped by the Mugabe regime. They constitute Zimbabwe's colonies of internal refugees.

The Mugabe regime has cynically manipulated the land issue to provide a context for political violence in order to subvert the political process and rig the presidential poll. Therefore, General Obasanjo's claim that the land issue defines the dimensions of the Zimbabwe crisis is at once wicked and deceptive. The Zimbabwe crisis is a crisis of governance and in his letter to you, and unbeknown to himself, General Obasanjo punctured a hole through his deceptive stance when he inaccurately reported to you the alleged substance of my short meeting with him.

For the record, General Obasanjo, speaking as Mugabe's emissary, suggested to me that the way towards the resolution of the Zimbabwe crisis lay in our recognition of Mugabe's fraudulent regime as the legitimate government of the day. This involved our withdrawal of the election challenge to Mugabe's presidency that is currently before the courts of law. This suggestion from General Obasanjo was a tacit admission that the crisis was one of Mugabe's legitimacy and not the land issue. By appealing to me to recognize the Mugabe regime as legitimate, General Obasanjo clearly implied that such a move would resolve the crisis.

I made it quite clear to the General that we in the MDC would not be part to any political arrangement that seeks to condone Mugabe's illegitimate rule. Our position has been a matter of public record for a long time now. The Zimbabwe crisis of governance can only be resolved if Mugabe upholds the rule of law; abandons political violence; respects human rights; repeals repressive laws; dismantles the militias and disarms the war veterans; removes the police, the army and the secret service from active politics as organised political units and puts in place irrevocable measures designed to ensure the holding of a free and fair presidential poll observed by the international community.

The MDC stands ready to play its part in any meaningful political process designed to bring about a resolution of the crisis of governance in Zimbabwe. However, the starting point of such a process can never be through legitimating a violent and murderous regime.

Mr. Prime Minister, the Mugabe regime has done absolutely nothing to roll back the frontiers of tyrannical rule in Zimbabwe. Instead, with the assistance and connivance of General Obasanjo and Mr. Mbeki, Mugabe has actually consolidated his dictatorship. The multilateral effort through the Commonwealth remains a viable route towards a resolution of the Zimbabwe crisis and the subversion of the mandate of the troika by General Obasanjo and Mr. Mbeki must be resisted.

By copy of this letter I would like to register my concerns and position to both General Obasanjo and Mr. Mbeki; the Secretary General of the Commonwealth Mr. Don McKinnon; Mr. Tony Blair; and the Secretary General of the United Nations Mr. Kofi Annan for their information and action.

I avail myself, Honourable Prime Minister, this opportunity to renew the assurances of my highest consideration.

Yours Sincerely,

Morgan Tsvangirai.