

# BACKGROUND

## *What is Transition? Why have Dialogue?*

The widely contested Presidential Poll, held from March 9-11 2002, resulted in what many have described as a “stolen” election victory for Zanu PF. The ruling party has retained political control, but with an increasingly tenuous grasp on the economic and social confidence of the majority of Zimbabweans.

In July 2003, inflation stood at 340%, unemployment at 75%, and over 80% of the Zimbabwean population lived below the poverty datum line. One in three adults are infected with HIV, and over 3500 people die each week from AIDS-related illness. Shortages have become the order of the day, with Zimbabweans queuing for bread, mealie meal, cooking oil, fuel, and even local currency.

It is widely acknowledged that the economic crisis has its roots in the political impasse in Zimbabwe which has been deepening since the 2002 Presidential Elections. Thus, a way forward through the humanitarian devastation which is plaguing the country can only be found through resolving Zimbabwe’s political differences.

Countries in the SADC region, led by South Africa, have long advocated for a Government of National Unity (GNU) in order to resolve these political

differences. National unity assumes that a consensus can be developed on the broad issues and vision relevant to the country. It also assumes that the full diversity of the country’s political opinion will be included in participation on national debate. Thus, the process through which GNU is achieved has direct implications in terms of viability. If one group controls a stronger portion of the resources, or one sector finds itself excluded from discussion, the entire effort may be sabotaged.

Zimbabwe has had several experiences with coalition governments whose objective was national unity. Memories of the Muzorewa/Smith Zimbabwe-Rhodesia coalition of 1978, the compromise independence government of 1980 and the Zanu PF/PF Zapu Unity Accord Government of 1987 are the most powerful examples.

These experiments with GNU have failed to build durable peace. They focussed on satisfying the interest of specific political elites, but failed to develop peace, justice and truth-telling on the ground. These experiences have made Zimbabweans suspicious of coalition governments, and the potential for the ruling party to manipulate a “unity” government to its own interests.



Thus, civil society leaders and the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition believe that a GNU would prove an inadequate mechanism through which to resolve the national crisis. Instead, there is a need to re-envision the political prospects for Zimbabwe, and restore elected democracy to the country.

The Coalition proposes, and the text of this conference confirms that the preferred mechanism for this would be through inclusive, national dialogue which incorporates not only all interested political parties but also a broad cross section of civil society, including churches, women, labour, students, and the businesses community. It is hoped that through this national process of re-visioning the political frame work of the country, Zimbabweans will be able to develop a collective agreement on the way forward.

Further, the Yellow Paper outlines the necessary Transition Period required to move Zimbabwe out of its current political polarisation<sup>1</sup>. Through the transition process, a new people-driven constitution should be developed. Existing unjust laws should be repealed and an equitable legal framework should be established. Political violence and intimidation should be stopped, and the youth militia and parastatal bodies dismantled. Media access and freedom of expression will have to be guaranteed, and the humanitarian and economic crisis should be urgently addressed. Above all else, the Transition Process should develop the necessary conditions for fresh national elections and a truth and justice process to heal Zimbabwe.

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1 See Appendix 14 for the full text of the yellow paper.