

STATE OF THE NATION AND OVERVIEW

BISHOP TREVOR MANHANGA

“To resolve this crisis, there is a need for political will.”

The keynote address of the conference was delivered by Mutare Bishop Manhanga⁶. The presentation noted that Zimbabwe was facing a crisis as epitomized by political polarization and rapid deterioration of the economy, the infrastructure, agriculture, decline in law enforcement and declining human rights standards.

Zimbabweans were urged to claim their democratic space in the economic and political governance of the country. Delegates were urged to map out solutions to the Zimbabwean political and economic quagmire in a creative and innovative manner.

To resolve these crises, there is a need for political will to define and achieve the way forward. Politicians will not automatically commit to such developments, but that the people must demand these commitments from them. However, Zimbabwe is suffering from a culture of compliance or “wait and see,” and its citizens do not demand accountability and action from those in positions of power. Zimbabweans must therefore develop a culture of accountability on the part of their rulers at all times, not only during election time by casting their vote.

Participants were urged to stop mud-slinging and finger pointing and instead seriously consider the future of Zimbabwe in a patriotic manner.

Economy

In economic issues, it was noted that economic inequalities are severe where there has been enrichment of a minority at the expense of a few. The decline in the economy has been drastic, with unemployment at 80%, inflation at over 300%, and the effects of HIV/AIDS being exacerbated by these economic hardships.

The delegates were urged to deliberate on alternative economic policies that would bring Zimbabwe back to its role as a centre of development in the region.

Human Rights, Truth and Justice

The presentation lamented the human rights abuses in Zimbabwe perpetrated by the police, state security agents, and extra-state agents such as militia and political party youths. He noted that Human Rights abuses had been on the increase since 2000, when Zimbabweans rejected the draft Constitution. Delegates were encouraged to work towards a zero tolerance policy for Zimbabwe for all acts of political violence. Delegates were also urged to deliberate on issues of repressive legislation including the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) that were restrictive of constitutionally guaranteed freedoms particularly in the area of the media, civil society operations, public order, security and political activism.



Bishop Trevor Manhanga

6 See Appendix 5 for a full copy of this presentation.

Issues of Truth, Justice and Reconciliation were highlighted, and participants were urged to objectively review these issues focussing on both the perpetrators and the injured.

Land Issue

The address recognised the need for land redistribution in Zimbabwe to correct the imbalances caused during colonialism. However it was pointed out that even with this background the government's land policy was never geared to correct the land imbalances as not much was done since 1980 and even after the lapse of the Lancaster House Constitution in 1990. The land redistribution policy through the Fast Track Land Resettlement Program was only used as a political tool to keep certain individuals in power and to enrich a few elites at the expense of the majority of the people.

Thus, the Fast Track Land Resettlement Program had resulted in a drastic reduction of production on Commercial Farms leading Zimbabwe to depend on food aid from the international community.

Delegates were urged to tackle the land question in terms of long-term requirements of the agriculture sector for sustainable productivity and the immediate future of the resettled farmers, displaced farm workers and the commercial farmers who have been force marched from their farms.

Legal/Constitutional

The Conference was urged to discuss key constitutional and legal questions surrounding the dispensation that will follow the conclusion of a political settlement. Some of the areas for discussion were: the rule of just law, opening up of democratic space and non-partisan application of the law to facilitate a free and robust discussion of national issues without fear of restraint or retribution.

Delegates were advised to discuss the legal and technical issues relating to the transitional mechanisms taking into cognisance that the present Zimbabwean constitution does not provide for any transitional mechanisms.

The need for dialogue was stressed, and civil society organizations were encouraged to focus on what the modalities would be and the intended outcome. Civil society was urged to ensure that the talks took into

consideration different view points from all sectors of the Zimbabwean society irrespective of the divergence of view points.

In conclusion, the delegates were advised to remember the following:

- ◆ That the future of Zimbabwe could not be determined without its people or without the mandate and adequate representation of its people
- ◆ The portrait of Zimbabwe's future had to include both our laugh lines and our marks of stress, i.e. our views, fears and aspirations and
- ◆ As non-state actors there was need to seek to amplify the people's voice and to ensure that such voice is heard.
- ◆ The need to set out time frames, guidelines and performance monitoring mechanisms not only for the transitional period but to guide the Coalition's activities in order to achieve the goals set out during the conference.

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