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FIRST REPORT
ON THE RHODESIAN GENERAL ELECTION
OF 1980
BY
AN INDEPENDENT AMERICAN OBSERVER DELEGATION

Delegation Composed of Representatives of:
American Committee on Africa
TransAfrica and the NAACP
Washington Office on Africa

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The Rhodesian General Election of 1980 was a seminal event. To assess the fairness of that election, a delegation of independent American observers visited Rhodesia from February 14 to March 1. Two of the delegates remain in Rhodesia to examine the post-election period and the formation of the new government. This report sets forth the findings of the delegation.

The delegation included Cynthia Cannady, representing TransAfrica of Washington, D.C. and the NAACP, Dr. Robert Edgar of Howard University's African Studies Center, George Houser, representing the American Committee on Africa of New York, Dr. Tilden LeMelle, also representing the American Committee on Africa, and Edgar Lockwood, representing the Washington Office on Africa of Washington, D.C.

Our observations led us to a general conclusion. It was that -- taking into account the conditions of war from which the country has barely emerged, the rapidity with which the election process was put in motion, the shortness of time for the two movements forming the Patriotic Front to re-establish themselves in the country and to organize an election campaign after being banned for so many years -- the election went much better than might have been expected.

Nevertheless there were serious irregularities in the campaign process and to a lesser extent in the voting itself which could have an effect on the election and call the "free and fair" principle into question. In Part I of our report we only briefly list these. Part II outlines these problems in more detail based on our experiences.

PART I

Before listing problems connected with the political campaigning we want to mention some positive elements:

- (1) Advertising space in newspapers and on television and radio seemed to be equally available to all parties. This was the case even with the daily paper which has for a long time supported the party of Bishop Muzorewa.
- (2) The actual voting period was not marred by any acts of wholesale violence by any forces -- the security forces, auxiliaries or the guerillas.
- (3) The ballot appeared to be truly secret. A great effort was made by the British governor to announce that the ballot would be secret and precautions were taken to prevent multiple voting and to screen voters so that those who were under-age would be excluded.
- (4) The level of violence during the three days of balloting was down significantly from the period of campaigning. Even the campaign period saw a decrease in the level of violence due to the ceasefire. There were approximately 350 deaths or an average of 5 deaths per day during the campaign. If deaths had continued at the same rate as before the ceasefire, there would have been 3500 deaths in the last two months.
- (5) A beginning was made in the last week toward the integration of the government forces with the Patriotic Front guerilla forces. This has within it the hope of establishing a true national force that can help maintain the peace.

(6) It was heartening that more than 93 percent of the potential voters cast their ballots. Obviously Zimbabwe is a well-politicized country. There is a sense of involvement by the people that should auger well for the future of the country.

Despite these positive developments, other factors have militated against free and fair elections. Among these have been:

(1) The deployment of auxiliary troops numbering about 26,000 to policing duties particularly in the tribal trust lands. These troops loyal to the United African National Council of Bishop Abel Muzorewa were not confined to the designated assembly points as were the Patriotic Front and ZANU-PF forces. Therefore they played an active role in intimidating people to support the UANC, and discouraging them from supporting other parties. (Our experiences and observations appear in Part II of this report.)

(2) The overwhelming military presence in Rhodesia fostered fear and a constant sense of intimidation among the people. This made casting a completely free ballot difficult. During the last two weeks of the campaign, for example, there was a government call-up which put an additional 96,000 reservists in uniform.

(3) Secret ballots do not necessarily affect intimidation that is intended to hinder campaigning. In an atmosphere of intimidation following so many years of war it is difficult to convince people that their votes are truly secret.

(4) The British authorities depended almost entirely on Rhodesian civil servants for the administration of the election. Given the bias of most white Rhodesians in favor of the UANC, and that it is common for white Rhodesians to equate ZANU-PF and the Patriotic Front with terrorism and Marxism, this calls into question the objectivity with which the elections might have been administered.

(5) The media was biased against the Patriotic Front and the ZANU-PF. Radio, television and the daily press constantly slanted the news in such a way as to accuse the two parties associated with the guerilla struggle of any violence which occurred without offering proof.

(6) Only a small percentage of the refugees in the neighboring countries of Zambia and Mozambique were returned to Rhodesia in time to vote. The largest number of refugees were in Mozambique, where only about 7 percent were returned by February 27. Since these people were sympathetic to ZANU-PF and the Patriotic Front, the candidates of these two parties lost in the neighborhood of 100,000 votes.

(7) The continuation of martial law and emergency regulations led to the arrest and the holding of a large number of people for at least a 30-day detention. The British reported that the number of martial law detainees had been reduced from 5,000 to 1,500. However, new arrests, particularly of party organizers and candidates have continued in significant numbers during the campaign. (See further details in Part II.)

We would like to state two final concerns in Part I of this report. One is the possibility that the Governor may not call on the political party which wins the largest number of seats in the House of Assembly in the election to attempt to form a government. It is possible that parties with smaller numbers in the House as well as a smaller percentage of the popular vote could form a coalition to out-vote the party with the largest number of seats. Such a coalition would be dependent upon the cooperation of the 20 seats held by whites who represent less than 4 percent of the population. If the Governor followed this path, it could lead to a lack of confidence in the whole process and a breakdown in law and order. It would undercut the purpose of the Lancaster House Agreement and the concept of majority rule.

Another concern is that some of the parties may not accept the results of the election. This could lead to a serious conflict between various military forces in the country, or to an attempt of a military coup, or the intervention of outside powers, such as South Africa, in Zimbabwe. Such intervention could well lead to a threat against international peace and security.

Part II

In making its observations of the election, the delegation particularly tried to examine the extent to which free campaigning by the parties and the free choice of the voters may have been interfered with throughout the country. To do this the delegation went to political rallies, briefings by election officials, tribal trust lands, urban townships and protected villages. The group interviewed villagers, party representatives, election officials, candidates, missionaries, military personnel, school teachers and social workers. This is a summary of the incidents of intimidation and other activities which hampered a free election which were reported to us.

A. Auxiliaries: Campaign Disruption and Intimidation

A young social worker at a Catholic mission in Sinoia told us that he was present at a ZANU-PF rally in Sipololilo on February 2nd. A permit had been given to hold the rally, but a group of auxiliaries, disputing the authority for the rally, shot into the crowd of 2000, killing three persons and injuring several others.

In an interview with Patriotic Front President Joshua Nkomo, we were told of an incident in Gokwe where auxiliaries shot and killed two persons when they became engaged in a dispute about attendance at a Patriotic Front rally in Bulawayo.

In Mhondoro Tribal Trust Land, south of Salisbury, we interviewed on February 16 several villagers and a school teacher who told us that the auxiliaries in the area frequently follow and beat people who have attended non-UANC rallies.

In Chiota Tribal Trust Land on February 17 we interviewed several teachers at a small, isolated school. They told us that auxiliaries frequently beat villagers for attending meetings.

In Fort Victoria on February 23 we interviewed two women from Mazorodze Tribal Trust Land in the Chibi district who had been forced at gunpoint by auxiliaries onto a bus bound for a Salisbury UANC rally. They escaped from the bus in Fort Victoria and were trying to get back home to their Tribal Trust Land when we met them.

In Mrewa both Patriotic Front and ZANU-PF offices told of auxiliaries forcing hundreds of villagers to get on busses bound for the same Salisbury rally mentioned above. One ZANU-PF bus was hijacked, and its driver made to lie down in a ditch and submit to caning.

A school teacher in Gutu, Victoria Province told us that the auxiliary forces frequently beat ZANU-PF sympathisers.

A school teacher and a villager in Mhondoro Tribal Trust Land told us that the auxiliaries had told them that, since the "boys" were gone, they (the villagers) had no one left and had to do as they were told.

A group of teachers in Sinoia told us that the auxiliaries threatened the rural people with death and destruction of their homes if they voted for ZANU-PF.

B. Arrests and Detentions

On February 17 three members of our delegation and a journalist were interviewing residents of villages and a school in Chiota Tribal Trust Land in Mashonaland East about the election. We were accompanied by four officials of ZANU-PF from the Salisbury office. We were arrested at gunpoint by about 15 security force personnel in a violent and abusive mood, apparently because we were traveling with "terrorists". We were taken to Mahusekwa base for questioning. On the bumpy road to Mahusekwa, an automatic weapon was held to the head of one of the ZANU-PF officials and he was repeatedly threatened and insulted. We passed three cars full of African civilians traveling in the opposite direction; the first two were stopped and required to travel with us to Mahusekwa. The third car, in which at least one passenger wore a UANC T-shirt, was waved on. Upon arrival at Mahusekwa, one of the ZANU-PF officials was kicked in the chest and hit on the face. We were detained for about an hour for questioning and then driven to the provincial center, Marandellas (about one-half hour away) for more questioning. At around 5:30 p.m. we and the ZANU-PF officials were released without charges. This incident was reported to the office of the Governor but we did not receive a response.

On February 19 a group of Dutch journalists traveling to an authorized political rally in Chiota Tribal Trust Land were stopped at gunpoint and taken to Mahusekwa base. The journalists told us that one security force member had accidentally fired a shot during the encounter.

In the early morning of February 16, about seven trucks of police and security forces raided the Mushandira Palmwe Hotel in Highfield Township outside of Salisbury where many ZANU-PF officials live. The police and army personnel had ransacked several rooms, stolen 1000 Rhodesian dollars of campaign funds and arrested 5 ZANU-PF supporters without charges. We saw the ransacked rooms and interviewed several witnesses.

On February 25 at 2:00 a.m. the same hotel was again raided by 80 to 100

policemen with 10 to 12 dogs arrested 35 persons. According to one of those arrested, police stormed in with weapons drawn, hit doors with truncheons, lined up the residents downstairs and searched the rooms of the hotel for one hour. Three persons were bitten by dogs, one seriously. The arrests were later explained as part of an investigation into a complaint of assault, but 34 of the 35 arrestees were released without charges within 48 hours.

On February 22, a high ZANU-PF official returning from a rally at Umtali was detained at Birchenbough bridge by army personnel. He was questioned for two hours concerning his possession of individual arms (a uniform practice by Rhodesian whites) even though he had a permit for such possession. During the 2 hours of questioning he was required to hold his arms up on the bridge supports.

On February 26, the first day of the polling, two members of our group witnessed the arrest of two ZANU-PF polling agents in Triangle Estates, Victoria District. The agents were accused of "intimidation" of voters when they took notes concerning an irregularity at the polling station: a dead rooster (the ZANU-PF party symbol) had been tacked to a tree with a sign "Jongwe is dead" (the rooster is dead). The two men remained in detention for that day and part of the next so that they were unable to fulfill their duties as polling agents.

In addition to the above incidents which we experienced or about which we received first-hand reports, we also received a number of secondary reports. Justin Nyoka, the publicity director of ZANU-PF, was arrested on charges of making subversive statements. The charges were dropped when the police explained that the arrest was a case of mistaken identity. No one was subsequently arrested for the alleged crime.

On February 15, the former ZANU-PF representative in Syria was arrested in Shabani and charged with subversive statements. He was subsequently released and the charges were dropped.

Another ZANU official was arrested for saying "Down with Muzorewa" at a rally. He was subsequently released without charges.

Around February 7 a ZANU-PF youth leader was arrested near Shabani at the Mashaba mines for making inflammatory statements at a rally. The priest who related the incident to us said that the youth had not actually addressed the crowd but had merely stood at one point to urge the crowd to "Please behave." As of February 23 when we interviewed the priest, the youth had still not been released.

Two members of our group traveled to the Sinoia police station to investigate reports that 12 ZANU-PF party officials had been arrested. The police superintendant told us that the 12 men were indeed in the prison but that he did not know what the charges against them were. He said he would look into it and report the next day, but no report came.

According to ZANU-PF records in Mucheke Township in Fort Victoria, 183 persons in that area were arrested, detained, abducted or beaten by security forces between February 6 and February 20. The party legal officer whom we interviewed on February 23 said that "perhaps 95 percent" of those arrested, including many of the treasurers, chairmen and organizing secretaries of the

villages in the area, remained in detention without charges. He stated that the British Election Commissioner for the area had been cooperative, but had been ineffective in obtaining release of the detainees from the local police and army.

According to the ZANU-PF candidate for Parliament in Gutu, Victoria District, twenty ZANU-PF officials and campaigners had been arrested since the beginning of the campaign and remained in detention as of February 20.

According to records in the ZANU-PF headquarters in Salisbury, 90 persons, including the chairmen and secretaries of the party branches, were arrested in Glen Nora township and 33 were arrested in the New Canaan area of Highfield Township outside of Salisbury. These reports were not followed up by our group and we do not know whether the detainees have been released.

According to the Patriotic Front candidate in Mrewa, ZANLA forces or sympathizers abducted 13 Patriotic Front party workers in Matakoto and one near Mrewa sometime in early February.

C. Illegal Campaigning by Rhodesian Military

In early February, Rhodesian government DC-3's were sighted air-dropping UANC pamphlets over Chiweshe Tribal Trust Land. The issue was raised with the Governor who deplored the practice and ordered an immediate end to it. On February 26, it was reported at the daily press briefing that the practice was continuing. The Governor's spokesman again deplored the practice. Government aircraft have also been observed dropping campaign literature in Fort Victoria and Gutu.

At Bereginia mission in Victoria province, Security Forces distributed leaflets attacking black governments "to the North" and instructed the people not to vote for the "Marxist party".

In CHIota Tribal Trust Land, a school teacher told us that the auxiliary forces regularly tear down ZANU posters.

D. Dirty Tricks: Efforts to Discredit ZANU-PF and the Patriotic Front

In mid-February, Salisbury was rocked by a series of explosions and one attempted bombing. The first occurred at 8:40 in a car in Harare Township. Then another bomb exploded near an Anglican church. It appeared to have been an accidental detonation of an explosive transported in the car. Two passengers, who were killed in the blast, were later uncontravertably identified as Selous Scouts. Two hours after the Harare blast, a bomb exploded in a church in the white Salisbury suburb of Boorowdale. Two minutes after that explosion, a massive explosion wrecked a Presbyterian Church downtown. The next morning, February 15 at 6:00 a.m. a briefcase containing an undetonated explosive device was found in the Catholic Cathedral. On the briefcase was inscribed "Pambere ne Mugabe" ("Forward with Mugabe").

This series of events was attributed by a UANC spokesman to "terrorists", reasoning that churches are "anathema to Marxist-communism". A Rhodesian Front spokesman attributed the attacks to "those people who follow the anti-Christ dictates of Marxism".

Patriotic Front and ZANU-PF representatives denied responsibility for the attacks, and claimed that they were part of a campaign to discredit their organizations by falsely associating them with anti-church sentiments. They pointed out that the Harare bombing was perpetrated by Selous Scouts and that the slogan found in the briefcase in the Catholic Church was written in ungrammatical and non-idiomatic Shona. Finally, they contended that they would have no motivation to attack churches in light of the history of good relations between the liberation movements and the Catholic Church.

No government investigation has produced, or at least released, further evidence relating to these incidents.

Controversy over this issue was also generated by the killing in separate incidents of two Catholic priests in rural missions. In early February an African priest and his assistant were killed in Zhimuta Tribal Trust Land. A note was found in the priest's car containing anti-Muzorewa slogans and signed by an auxiliary force member. Subsequently two men claiming to be ZANU-PF members confessed to the crime. Patriotic Front and ZANU-PF spokesmen have denied responsibility and pointed out that no prosecution of the two confessed murderers has taken place.

Approximately a week after the bombing incidents another priest was murdered at Beregina mission in Victoria province. Responsibility was attributed by the press to ZANLA "terrorists". In interviews with the priest and nun who were present at the killing, we learned that the murdered priest had been a ZANU-PF sympathizer and had been outspoken in his criticism of the security forces and auxiliaries. The priest stated that the murderers were strangers to the isolated mission, whereas he had lived at the mission for 16 years and knew all of the ZANLA forces in the area. Two of the children present at the scene of the murder identified one murderer as a member of the security forces who had visited the mission the previous week to ask permission to hold a rally there. He had been denied permission by the deceased priest. The murderers, we were told, had conducted a marxist harangue before the murder, desecrated bibles and preached the inconsistency of Christianity and Communism. The priest and nun we interviewed stated that there was no firm basis for attributing guilt to any individual or group.

At 3:00 a.m. in the morning on February 24 the Mambo Press, a Catholic press that publishes the "Moto" newspaper was destroyed by a bomb. "Moto" is a critical weekly that had been banned by the Smith regime. One week prior to the bombing a fake issue of "Moto" accusing Mugabe of Marxism and homosexuality had been printed and distributed throughout the country. Members of our group interviewed one worker at Mambo press the day after the explosion. He told us that remains of two bodies had been found in the ruins that morning -- one white and one black. This information was subsequently confirmed by the British press spokesman and the police, thus contributing to speculation that the bombing was part of a "dirty trick" by Selous Scouts to associate ZANU-PF with anti-Christianity. The worker whom we interviewed also felt that the bombing was part of a plan to "pay back the church for its commitment to social justice."