



# Defiance

vs

# Repression

*Critical Reflections on “the final push”*

June 2-6 2003



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MA 001/03

## **What is the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition?**

Crisis in Zimbabwe is a coalition of more than 350 civil society organisations. It was originally conceived in August 2001 as a collective response by Zimbabwean civics to the multi-faceted crisis facing the nation. The Coalition represents a broad cross section of Zimbabwean civil society, including labour, students, women, church groups, human rights activists, media practitioners, war veterans, farmers, lawyers, doctors and pro-democracy actors.

The vision of the Coalition is a democratic Zimbabwe. The Coalition addresses Zimbabwe's twin crises of governance and legitimacy.

### **Aims of the Coalition:**

- To enhance Civil Society's capacity to deal with socio-economic and political crises, through encouraging well coordinated strategic planning and action.
- To promote freedom and democratic values through encouraging dialogue, tolerance and the shaping of ideas by Zimbabweans from all walks of life.

### **Objectives of the Coalition:**

To this end, the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition:

- Strives to respond timeously to government positions regarding various key policy areas;
- Strives to share ideas and information for use by CSO's in the articulation of credible, alternative and practical views;
- Seeks to ensure the rapid development of a participatory democracy in Zimbabwe;
- Is determined to amplify the collective voice of Civil Society in Zimbabwe.
- Aims to cover issues which would otherwise not fall within the mandate of the major CSO's.
- Encourages the input of Zimbabweans into policy formulation and governance generally, and
- Highlights, debates, researches and proposes solutions to the various dimensions of the multi-layered national crisis.

The Coalition is comprised of five semi-autonomous committees. These are **Advocacy, Finance, Human Rights, Information and Civic Education** and **Peace Building**. Each committee organises its own campaigns and events, but also works in collaboration with the entire Coalition.

The Coalition is currently organising around campaigns including:

- Zvakwana—Enough is enough!
- A Time for Peace
- Leadership for Transformation
- Freedom from Hunger
- Repeal Unjust Laws
- Queue for Freedom

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The mass action called by the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and dubbed “the Final Push” (June 2-6 2003) was met by fierce resistance by all arms of the state machinery. This report is both narrative of the events of the week beginning June 2, 2003 and an introspection on the preparedness or otherwise of the pro-democracy movement. It seeks to demonstrate why there is still hope for the democratic cause despite incessant state repression.

## 1. Setting the Stage—Context of the Mass Action<sup>1</sup>

Zimbabwe’s increasingly repressive social circumstances, its declining economic situation, its increasing human rights abuses and its severely polarised political framework are crucial for understanding the context within which the MDC called for “the final push.” Such a broader understanding avoids the pitfall of reducing the resolutions of Zimbabwe’s current difficulties into simply a political party contest for state power. The severity of Zimbabwe’s multi-layered crisis provides a compelling reminder of the urgency with which a solution must be sought. It sets the broader context for the political contestations.

### 1.1 Food Security

A regional drought has impacted Zimbabwe’s food security situation even more intensely than that of other countries in SADC, largely because of the politics of chaos that attended the Fast Track Land Resettlement Programme, economic mismanagement, and a government monopoly on food distribution. Sustained efforts to break this monopoly have begun to bear fruit.

Despite a brief improvement in the food security situation in the rural areas immediately after the summer harvest, there is still a significant need for food aid for Zimbabwe’s rural communities<sup>2</sup>. In addition, large urban areas including Bulawayo, Chitungwiza, Gweru and Harare report a desperate food security situation. A health official in Bulawayo reported that forty people died from malnutrition in Bulawayo in the first two months of this year<sup>3</sup>. This is largely due to the non-availability of goods at the gazetted rates, and a burgeoning parallel market in which most goods are unaffordable to the 80% of Zimbabweans who live below the poverty datum line (PDL). The humanitarian crisis cannot await the resolution of the political impasse.

A recent report by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) indicates that this year’s harvest will only supply Zimbabwe with 30% of its food needs<sup>4</sup>. In other words, without substantial food importation and/or an aggressive donor aid programme, Zimbabwe’s food supply for the year will be depleted within four months.

### 1.2 Political Violence

Politically motivated violence continues to plague Zimbabwean society. The Human Rights NGO Forum reports that in April alone there were over 89 cases of assault and abduction and 270 cases of unlawful arrest and detention<sup>5</sup>.

The opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) organised a mass stay away on March 18-19. The stay away was largely heeded nationally. It predictably provoked an immediate and brutal reaction from Zanu PF. On March 19, Steven Toner was killed

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1. See “Slouching Towards Transition? An update of the Zimbabwe situation—April/May 2003.” Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, May 23, 2003. This and other Crisis Coalition reports are available through the Kubatana.net website. See **Sources** at the end of this document for more information on these and other sources referred to in this report.
  2. See FOSENET, NGO Food Security Network *Community Assessment of the Food Situation in Zimbabwe*, April 2003. FOSENET reports can be accessed through the Kubatana.net website.
  3. See *The Daily News*, 18 May 2003.
  4. This was reported in *The Daily News* on 13 June 2003 and on SW Radio Africa, 13 June 2003.
  5. Monthly reports on political violence in Zimbabwe can be accessed from the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum.

when soldiers attacked the Ruwa farm where he worked. In the period immediately following the first MDC-led stay away, violence escalated to scales higher than during either the 2000 or 2002 election campaigns<sup>6</sup>. Over 600 pro-democracy activists, including civic leaders, councillors, opposition Members of Parliament and national leaders were arrested in the two weeks after the stay away. Over 800 people, primarily activists, but also their neighbours, colleagues, husbands, wives and children were beaten, tortured, raped, assaulted and victimised due to their actual or perceived involvement with the stay away. In particular, women were targeted in these attacks, and were subjected to sexual assault and rape. Individuals in police and military uniforms were the main perpetrators of the violence in these two weeks<sup>7</sup>.

### *1.3 Rule of Law*

The general dis-regard—by the Zanu PF government—for the rule of law took a new and absurd twist in April. On April 29, Dr Ignatius Chombo, the Minister for Local Government, purported to suspend Harare's Mayor, Engineer Elias Mudzuri for alleged mismanagement of the City affairs, which "(lead) to a decline in service delivery" within Harare. Chombo also sighted mismanagement of public finances and "gross insubordination and wilful default on lawfully issued instructions and directions" from the Minister's office.

Despite these allegations, residents of Harare have actually witnessed enhanced service delivery since the election of an executive mayor and council. There have been problems with service delivery, for example in terms of rubbish collection and water purification. However, these obstacles are largely attributed to the fuel and foreign currency crises facing the entire country, and few residents have blamed the Mayor for these shortcomings. Thus, the majority of Zimbabweans dismissed

Chombo's communication as an ill-reasoned political ploy.

On May 8, ten days after the purported suspension, the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) banned the weekly consultative meetings (with Harare residents), which had been previously held at Town House. The meetings have been banned until further notice, as they were "inciting public disorder." These events demonstrate the extent to which the ruling party has lost moral and political credibility. It is this kind of "political gangsterism" that serves to further polarise Zimbabwean society at a time when all efforts should be channelled towards dialogue. Indeed many have opined that a government that has mismanaged the economy, to the extent that the incumbent has, is ill-qualified to accuse any one else of poor service delivery. What is most perturbing is the extreme premium that is placed on political gamesmanship at the expense of objective national interests.

### *1.4 Energy Crisis*

Since 1999, corruption in the energy parastatals and the non-availability of foreign currency have translated into erratic supplies of both electricity and fuel. Since December 2002 (when Mugabe promised to personally take charge of the management of the fuel situation at the Zanu PF Congress), the situation has significantly declined.

Fuel is largely unavailable in both urban and rural areas. It is common for motorists to park their vehicles for days at a service station, in anticipation of the arrival of fuel deliveries. Fuel price increases, aimed at bringing Zimbabwe's fuel costs more in line with the rest of the region, have done nothing to improve the availability of fuel. Instead, the 70%-300% price increase has exacerbated Zimbabwe's spiralling inflation,

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6. See "Organised Violence March 20-24 2003," a report by the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, March 2003.

7. Notably, the army and police have vehemently denied any involvement in these criminal activities. This fact notwithstanding, no attempt has been made to investigate this very serious breach of state security and citizens' rights and freedoms by persons allegedly impersonating members of the disciplined forces. This failure is fatal to the uniformed forces' pleas of innocence.

slowed or halted business and has worsened an already desperate economic situation.

Many of Zimbabwe's regional electricity suppliers have reduced or suspended electricity supplies due to non-payment of debts. This has resulted in frequent and unscheduled load shedding, particularly in urban areas. The Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA) has informed the public through the press that it is unable to determine electrical demand in advance, and therefore load shedding occurs in any area at any time. This has resulted in business retrenchments and suspensions across the country, particularly in the industrial areas of Harare and Bulawayo. Unable to depend on electricity supplies, managers and business owners have had to drastically cut down on their operations. This has resulted in further unemployment, and a further decline in economic productivity, particularly in Zimbabwe's formal-sector economy.

### 1.5 *Economic Indicators*

Zimbabwe's economy continues to spiral rapidly out of control. The April increase in the price of fuel triggered massive price increases across the board. Transport, food, and even rental costs have all skyrocketed in the past month. In December last year, year-on-year inflation based on the Consumer Price Index was estimated at 199%. In March, it was calculated at 228%. By the end of April, it was 269%. Even the government's attempt at price controls have had little impact. Instead, the parallel market is expanding daily. Inflation based on parallel market prices is estimated at between 500-600%. Most goods are no longer available at the gazetted prices, and consumers find themselves charged as much as four times the gazetted price for goods ranging from mealie meal to fuel. In addition, most producers have developed "new" products, or repackaged old ones, in order to avoid the letter of the price control legislation.

In recent weeks, the foreign currency market has crumbled further. In March, government attempted to curb the foreign exchange parallel market by establishing a dual exchange rate. This saw the US/Zimbabwe dollar exchange

rate go from US\$1 : ZW\$55 to US\$1 : ZW\$824. Despite these measures, the parallel market remained active, due to the non-availability of foreign currency. For months, the parallel market rate remained around US\$1 : ZW\$1300-1500. At the end of May, however, the Zimbabwe dollar plunged to US\$1 : ZW\$2700. There is speculation that the only thing curbing a further decline of the Zimbabwe dollar is the critical lack of cash with which to buy foreign currency. Zimbabwe's growing dependence on imported goods will only worsen inflation in the country.

### 1.6 *Regional and International Factors*

Regionally, there had been increasing pressure from the African *troika*, and growing indications from Mbeki and Obasanjo that the level of human rights abuses experienced in Zimbabwe is unacceptable. The African Union has recognised the stumbling block which Zimbabwe presents in its efforts to promote NEPAD to donor countries and secure funding for the programme. International bodies such as the G8 have also begun to understand the threat which Zimbabwe's pariah status presents to the region. While these interventions are both important and valuable, many actors in the democratic struggle have pointed out the need to sustain action within Zimbabwe.

It was within this backdrop of economic collapse and increasing political instability that the MDC orchestrated "the final push," in an effort to bring Zanu PF to the negotiating table and begin serious discussions on the way forward.

## 2. Build up to “the final push”

### 2.1 *Messaging*

The stay away called by the MDC on March 18-19 culminated with a list of 15 “demands” which the party wanted urgently addressed by government, and an unspecific “ultimatum” that further mass action was in the wings if these demands were not attended to. The announcement of the “final push” was thus seen as the next step towards these objectives.

Information about the action was provided primarily through press advertisements and at rallies and public meetings. The MDC launched an aggressive media campaign, particularly through the independent papers (especially *The Daily News*), inserting numerous full page advertisements using black and red print, text and graphics to raise awareness of the intended “action for national survival<sup>8</sup>.”

At a rally in Highfields on May 25, MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai called for a week of prayer, to be followed by a week of action. Press statements and advertisements following this date gradually added more detail to the action, and articulated what the MDC hoped to expect from it.

### 2.2 *Objectives of “the Final Push”*

In press statements and interviews, the MDC announced that the objective of “the final push” was to pressurise government to come to the dialogue table and seek a negotiated solution to Zimbabwe’s governance crisis<sup>9</sup>.

A statement from the MDC regarding transition, however, made it clear that while the MDC wanted Zanu PF to come to the dialogue table, their intentions for negotiations were for Robert Mugabe to leave office, and for fresh elections to be held within 90 days of this event<sup>10</sup>. The party dismissed the need for a transitional period, citing its concerns that this would delay the economic recovery which

Zimbabwe desperately needs to resolve its humanitarian crisis.

### 2.3 *Form and Content*

The precise form and content of the mass action remained largely undefined in public communications. This was attributed to security concerns and the MDC’s fear of infiltration. In its advertisements, the party clearly called for a week-long job stay away. It also urged Zimbabweans to participate in less specified mass actions which would be organised during the week, and urged people to consult with their local party structures for further details.

Those active in MDC local structures were reported to have gained more clarity on what they specifically were to do, through the communication channels of those structures.

On the eve of June 2, advertisements and mobile phone messages urged people to gather at an unspecified place in the city centre of their nearest town at 10 am on that day, in order to meet for the march. On the eve of June 6, advertisements and messages instructed demonstrators to march to specific locations in Zimbabwe’s major city centres on that morning.

Regardless of the methods employed or the specifics of the action, the queues that stretched at banks and supermarkets in the days before the mass action provided a powerful indication that despite problems securing cash, soaring prices and the uncertainty of the state response to the “final push,” the majority of Zimbabweans had heeded the opposition’s warnings and were prepared for something significant to occur.

8. See *The Daily News* on virtually any day from May 5 to June 1 2003.

9. See for example *Zimbabwe Watch* 29 May 2003, an interview with Morgan Tsvangirai, and advertisements inserted by the party in *The Daily News* on 29-31 May 2003.

10. See “Remarks by the MDC President at a meeting with the G8 Ambassadors,” 27 May 2003, MDC Department of Information and Publicity.



### 3. Reactions to “the final push”

#### 3.1 Civil Society’s Perspectives

In the weeks before the announcement of the June mass action, there were indications from civil society actors concerning what might be expected. Douglas Mwonzora, the Spokesperson for the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) was reported as saying that the NCA was “coordinating with the MDC, ZCTU, Crisis and TIZ to organise a mass action that will force government to at least make constitutional provisions to make it possible for the establishment of a transitional authority.”<sup>11</sup>

Following an Executive Council meeting in Kadoma, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) called on its members to “store a bucket of mealie meal and save a penny” in preparation for an indefinite job stay away which it said it would call at the end of May<sup>12</sup>. The ZCTU President, Lovemore Matombo indicated that a direct approach of united mass action was necessary to persuade government to listen to the labour body’s concerns. He said talking to government about workers’ woes is “like talking to an insensitive Chimpanzee—they feel no remorse about the current crisis<sup>13</sup>.”

Civil society, however, had largely agreed on the need for a transitional period in order to institute certain necessary constitutional, legal and electoral reforms in particular. It found these reforms essential in order to ensure that future leaders do not further abuse their power, and to prevent any continued entrenchment of unacceptable governance standards. Statements by organisations including the NCA, Crisis Coalition and Zimbabwe Liberators Platform (ZLP), to name a few, further articulated this position.

#### 3.2 State Response

Consistent with Matombo’s comments, an insensitive ruling party dismissed the threats of mass action, and seemed deaf to people’s discontent. It ran advertisements in *The Herald* and on ZBC TV, telling people “Don’t pay for their illegal stay away” and “use the law to collect your losses.” Throughout May and during the week of the stay away, it promoted an aggressive “No to Mass Action” campaign, reproducing sections of the Labour Relations Act in the press, and denouncing “mass violence,” and “illegal stay aways.” Pro-democracy activists had coined the expression the “Zvakwana—Enough is Enough,” meaning enough of bad governance, economic decline and corruption. The Department of Information and Publicity in the Office of the President and Cabinet appropriated this slogan and transformed it to say enough of sabotage, enough of violence and enough of British puppets and Rhodesian sell-outs.

In addition, the public press extensively covered extensively stories of individuals and companies who intended to pursue legal action to claim for damages to property which was allegedly incurred as a result of previous mass actions<sup>14</sup>. Through the public press the government announced that it would “crush any demonstration which will lead to the destruction of property or present a threat to national security<sup>15</sup>.” It further reminded people that the “security forces (were) on full alert<sup>16</sup>.” The Minister of Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, Patrick Chinamasa, and Police Spokesperson Wayne Bvudzijena both appeared on state television declaring that the “national machinery” would be invoked to “crush the coup d’etat<sup>17</sup>.”

In an effort to further sensationalise “the final push,” ZBC TV and the state press featured

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11. *The Daily News*, May 19 2003.

12. *The Standard*, 18 May 2003.

13. *Ibid.*

14. See for example *The Herald*, 27 and 29 May 2003 and 3 June 2003.

15. Minister of Home Affairs Kembo Mohadi, as reported in *The Herald* 27 May 2003.

16. See *The Herald*, 31 May 2003.

17. ZBC TV, 31 May 2003.



commentaries and editorials averring that this event would “make or break” the MDC.

Thousands of flyers were printed by the Ministry of Information and littered the streets of Zimbabwe’s major towns. These flyers advised people to “Rambai Makashinga” (stay committed) and carried messages similar to those discussed above. They urged people to stand up for their rights, to let the workers go to work, to permit the children go to school and to allow the banks and businesses to open.

### 3.3 *Legal channels*

In addition to condemning the mass action in the press and threatening to prosecute organisers and participants alike, the ruling party also used the courts to try and prevent the mass action from taking off. Employing “night justice” tactics it secured a High Court order from Judge Ben Hlatshwayo on Saturday May 31 which outlawed the MDC’s planned peaceful protests.

The MDC responded by declaring the order a “legal nullity<sup>18</sup>,” claiming that the order was irregular and not properly completed. The party insisted that its plans would go ahead unchanged. Tsvangirai was briefly detained on the morning of June 2, the first day of “the final push,” in a move which perhaps the state hoped would drive people to explosion and enable an even greater military crack down. He was charged with contempt of court for violating the May 31 order, but was released in order to enable him to attend the on-going treason trial of himself and two other MDC officials.

The MDC countered the order in the Supreme Court, and the Attorney General confirmed that there was no law which to prohibit stay aways. The MDC claimed that the order was suspended by virtue of this appeal, and could only be enforced after the appeal had been heard. The High Court, however, countered this assertion, and declared that the order would continue to hold the force of law.

As discussed below, Tsvangirai was re-arrested on June 6 and charged with treason. In addition, scores of other MDC leaders, Members of Parliament, officials and members were arrested and charged under POSA, or detained without charges during the week, making the government’s attempts at legal action appear haphazard, and leading to allegations that the ruling party was on a “shopping spree” for charges to file against MDC leaders and the organisers of the mass action.

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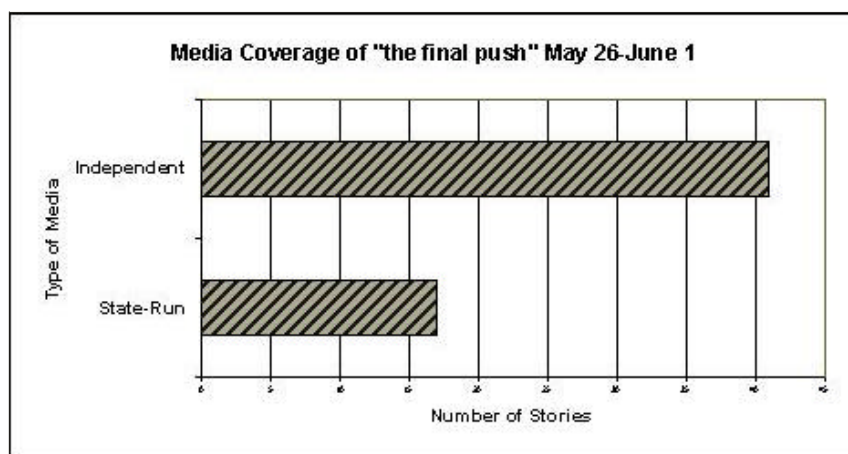
18. See *The Standard*, 1 June 2003.

#### 4. Media Coverage

Part of the challenge faced in organising and sustaining the mass action was the communication of activities and expectations. During the mass action itself, public press coverage of “the final push” differed greatly from that of the independent press. The event provided a telling indication of the polarisation of the Zimbabwean media into two completely divergent factions.

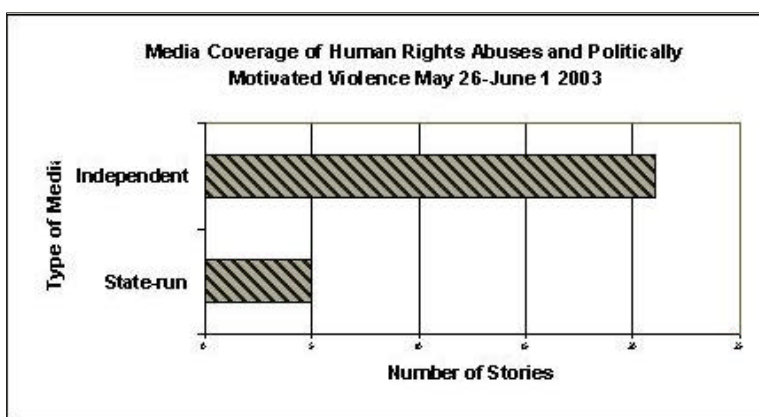
The Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe (MMPZ)<sup>19</sup>, featured press coverage of the run up to “the final push” in its June 6 update, covering the week of May 26-June 1, 2003. MMPZ reported that both the quantity of news about the impending mass action, and the substance of this coverage varied significantly between the state and private media.

As the graph below indicates, 71% of the news stories discussing the mass action in the week of May 26-June 1 were reported in the private press.



In addition, MMPZ indicated that the private press presented a more thorough analysis of the growing trend of state repression in the

build up to the mass action. As reflected in the graph below, out of 26 stories in that week which discussed politically motivated violence and human rights abuses, only 5 were reported in the state media. Not surprisingly, all five of these stories blamed the MDC for human rights abuses, while all 21 of the stories in the private press condemned government hypocrisy in preaching peace while applying violence, and blamed Zanu PF heavy handedness for the human rights violations.



As this analysis reflects, Zimbabwe’s political polarisation is particularly apparent in its press coverage. Thus, any analysis of the media coverage of politically charged events largely becomes an exercise in comparing two dichotomous extremes, rather than providing an objective appreciation of events through an examination of unbiased press reports.

The privately run *Daily News* attempted to run a “special edition” series from June 2-6, in order to further “tell it like it is” and keep the nation fully informed on the mass action and the state response. However,

citing “problems encountered in printing and delivering the papers,” *The Daily News* was only able to print the Special Edition once, on

19. MMPZ tracks and records key stories and the manner in which they are reported in the Zimbabwe Press, and provides weekly updates on media coverage of key events.

Monday June 2<sup>20</sup>. During the week of “the final push,” the paper ran a series of sensationalist stories about the success of the stay away, the brutality of the state response, and the commitment of the MDC to pursue mass action despite the obstacles facing it. It supported these stories with daring and provocative photographs of victims of violence and police in riot gear patrolling urban centres and arresting activists.

Initially, the state media attempted to portray the mass action as chaotic, violent and lawless. It sensationalised the efforts of the MDC to call on businesses to close, and reported an aggressive and “satanic” crowd of MDC activists had killed an Zanu PF supporter in Mbare on Monday June 2<sup>21</sup>.

The state media also featured misleading and dubious coverage in an effort to dismiss the effectiveness of the stay away. In one story on ZBC TV News, the broadcaster gleefully informed the nation about all shops which were open on Monday June 2. In the background, footage of an open supermarket was shown. However, the “Daily Specials” board read Sunday June 1<sup>22</sup>, thus casting suspicions on the truthfulness of this and other footage. As the week progressed, the state used news reports on the radio, on television and in the press to call the mass action a failure and to reassure the nation that peace was intact, businesses were open, and commuters were streaming to work<sup>23</sup>.

Ultimately, the state coverage of the “final push” was an illustrative example of the politics of repression and denial at which Zanu PF has become so proficient. For example, one

international news programme showed footage of water cannons rolling on to the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) campus<sup>24</sup>. In an interview on this same programme, the Minister of Information and Publicity in the Office of the President and Cabinet, Professor Jonathan Moyo, blatantly denied that water cannons had gone to the UZ, telling the reporter “you did not see that<sup>25</sup>.” Similarly, in an interview on SABC, Robert Mugabe shed crocodile tears as he admitted that it was “unfortunate that (he was) forced to use teargas on (his) youth<sup>26</sup>.”

In addition, SW Radio Africa<sup>27</sup> ran extensive news briefings during “the final push,” often exceeding their hour-long news time to provide interviews, eye-witness accounts and updates from across the country. These briefs were only broadcast over short wave radio, however, and therefore were only available to those Zimbabweans who had access to short wave radio.

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20. This was no doubt a reflection of, among other things, the fact that copies of the Daily News were shredded and destroyed by ruling party sympathisers. This is further discussed below.

21. See *The Herald*, 3 and 4 June 2003.

22. ZBC TV Main News Programme, 2 June 2003.

23. See *The Herald*, 5 and 6 June 2003.

24. CNN News Broadcast 3 June 2003.

25. This is strikingly similar to the behaviour of the Iraqi Minister of Information in April 2003, who denied the presence of US troops in Baghdad—even as the tanks could be heard patrolling the streets outside his office.

26. SABC News 3 June 2003.

27. SW Radio Africa is a radio programme broadcasting on shortwave radio from the United Kingdom. The programme runs for three hours each evening and features a one hour “news reel.” While it is operated by Zimbabweans, it has faced repeated threats by the ruling party who have dubbed it an “illegal” and “pirate” radio station.

## 5. Human Rights Abuses and State-Sponsored Repression—A Narrative

As indicated in the Coalition’s May 2003 Update<sup>28</sup>, worrying trends can be observed within the human rights scenario in Zimbabwe. These trends were repeated in the most recent wave of violence, including:

- the use of military and uniformed police;
- specific targeting of people on the grounds of their (actual or perceived) political affiliation;
- a gender component degrading to women, including sexual abuse and indecent assault, whereby women were specifically targeted for their involvement in or association with the opposition;
- indiscriminate use of force in places of public utility (e.g. schools and hospitals).

The continued involvement of the military in acts of state repression raises problematic questions about civil-military relations. These questions bring to the fore discussions about the politicisation of the military, the integrity of law enforcement agencies and the state of human rights generally.

### 5.1 Arrests

Across Zimbabwe, members of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) arrested hundreds of pro-democracy activists. The majority of these were detained for two days, consistent with the provisions of the Public Order and Security Act (POSA), and many were released without charge. While the final numbers have yet to be confirmed, the figures below provide some indication of the number of people arrested in connection with the MDC-led mass action<sup>29</sup>.

<i>Bulawayo</i>	Over 50 detained, including Mpopoma Member of Parliament Milton Gwetu and Mayor Japhet Ncube
<i>Gweru</i>	35 Detained
<i>Harare and Chitungwiza</i>	Over 380 detained, including Members of Parliament: --Tendai Biti (Harare East), --Pearson Mungofa (Highfields), --Tichaona Munyanyi (Mbare East) and --Job Sikhala (St Mary’s)
<i>Kwekwe</i>	15 Detained
<i>Marondera</i>	53 Detained
<i>Masvingo</i>	24 detained, including Member of Parliament Silas Mangono
<i>Mutare</i>	43 detained

In Victoria Falls and other smaller towns across Zimbabwe, opposition activists were also detained by the ZRP for allegedly agitating for mass action.

As discussed above, MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai was arrested on Monday June 2, 2003 and charged with contempt of court following the High Court order barring the mass action. On Friday June 6, he was arrested again, and charged with treason<sup>30</sup> in relation to statements allegedly made in May, in the run up to the “final push.” He was remanded in custody by the Magistrate’s

28. See “Slouching Towards Transition? An update of the Zimbabwe situation—April/May 2003.” Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, May 23, 2003.

29. The statistics featured below were either reported in the press (including *The Daily News* and SW Radio Africa Broadcasts during the week) or by the MDC Information Department and the Humanitarian Helplines Information Centre.

30. As reported in *The Standard* on 8 June 2003, legal experts observed that this may represent the first time in the history of Zimbabwe that a single individual has been charged twice for treason.

Court until July 10, 2003<sup>31</sup>. At the time of publishing this report, 13 days after his arrest, he was still in detention. On Monday June 9, police also arrested MDC Secretary General Welshman Ncube for treason, but the charges were dropped the next day. These MDC leaders faced their second set of treason charges, which are without sound legal foundation and smack of vindictiveness.

In short, Members of Parliament, a mayor, councillors, pro-democracy activists, students unfortunate by-standers and members of the MDC leadership including its President and Secretary General were all arrested during the week, in an effort by the state to clamp down on further mass action. The arrest of prominent MDC personalities is just one recurring trend.

In Masvingo and Bulawayo, efforts by friends and relatives to bring food to the detainees were thwarted, in contravention of the Constitution of Zimbabwe and international standards. The Masvingo Member of Parliament and 24 other detainees were denied food for two days<sup>32</sup>. In Bulawayo, three female human rights activists were arrested when they attempted to bring food to the detainees on Thursday June 5<sup>33</sup>. The use of deprivation of food as a tool of retribution is contrary to international human rights norms and constitutes a gross violation of the rights, privileges and interests of the detainees.

## 5.2 Violence

In Harare and Bulawayo, police used dogs, teargas, armed personnel carriers, water cannons, helicopters and live ammunition to disperse peaceful demonstrators in both the city centre and high density suburbs. On Monday June 2, police in Highfields fired live ammunition at a group of demonstrators marching peacefully towards the city centre<sup>34</sup>.

At least two people were treated in hospital for gunshot wounds<sup>35</sup>. Reports indicated a significant presence of military and paramilitary actors in the high-density areas, with army tankers and military helicopters doing rounds throughout the day. This military and police occupation continued throughout the week. In Harare city centre, there was a heavy police presence on the afternoon of Monday June 2, and the police details were observed intimidating groups of by-standers by forcing them to do press ups on the side of the road, or by ordering them carry their bicycles over their heads to cross the street. The police presence was similar in Bulawayo, Mutare, Gweru and other major towns across the country.

A new level of intimidation was experienced in Harare. During the week under review, thousands of youths gathered at the Zanu PF party Headquarters. On Friday June 6, these youths were deployed across the city, gathering in small groups at street corners, in Africa Unity Square and in other areas of the city where it was suspected that pro-democracy activists might congregate.

Members of the state security forces and para-military groups also moved through the high-density suburbs, particularly of Harare and Bulawayo, intimidating residents. Members of the ZRP and Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) patrolled the townships with known Zanu PF activists, identifying the homes of known MDC organisers and suspected party sympathisers. In addition, it was reported that the ZNA gave uniforms to Zanu PF youths, who assaulted suspected

31. The Magistrate's Court lacks the authority to offer bail for persons accused of offenses as serious as treason. Thus, Tsvangirai's bail application was referred to the High Court, which delayed for at least one week before announcing its ruling.

32. This was reported in by the MDC Department of Information and Publicity on 3 and 4 June 2003.

33. Confirmation of this incident was provided by an independent human rights activist, and is also featured on [www.kubatana.net](http://www.kubatana.net)

34. This incident was reported in *The Daily News Special Edition* on 2 June 2003, and by independent reports received by the Coalition and the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum.

35. This was confirmed by staff members at the private hospital in Harare where the two were treated.



MDC sympathisers<sup>36</sup>.

The Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights (ZADHR) reported that over 85 people were treated from Monday June 2 – Wednesday June 4 for injuries sustained when they were reportedly beaten by members of the uniformed forces. ZADHR reported concern at both the number of patients and the severity of the injuries sustained. A few telling examples follow.

In Mbare, the police raided the home of Councillor Mazaranhanga, and assaulted him in front of his 18 year-old daughter. The councillor and his nephew, Tichaona Kaguru were abducted from Mbare and taken to Mabvuku where they were severely beaten and abandoned in the bush. They found transport to Chikurubi Clinic, where Kaguru later died<sup>37</sup>. Police dispersed mourners at Kaguru's funeral wake on Friday night<sup>38</sup>. They assaulted his mother, and his wife fled fearing for her safety<sup>39</sup>.

In a separate incident, police entered the Mbare home of a suspected MDC activist. Inside the dwelling was woman with a day-old baby girl<sup>40</sup>. The woman had given birth in her house, because she could not find transport to the hospital. Members of the ZRP entered her home, assaulted her, and threw teargas into the dwelling. The mother was taken to hospital and treated for head injuries and a broken arm. The baby was also taken to hospital for



*Youths such as these patrolled the streets of Harare on June 6, 2003.*  
**Photo by Crisis Coalition**

suffocation, and is in a stable condition. The persistent gender dimensions of police brutality merit an urgent and independent investigation.

Many of the Harare residents who were injured in the June 2-6 wave of assaults were treated at the Avenues Clinic in Harare. On Wednesday June 4, members of the ZRP stormed this clinic and created a panic threatening outpatients, those awaiting treatment and even Hospital staff<sup>41</sup>. Victims of violence were easily identified by their bandages, and these people in particular were targeted by the police. Vehicles with ZRP and ZNA number plates were observed outside the clinic at this time, and at least two people were witnessed being accompanied by riot details to these vehicles. The behaviour of the ZRP instilled even more fear among people who had already been severely beaten, tortured and brutalised.

The incidents of police brutality outlined in this report violate the ZRP Service Charter,

36. Verification of reports of this nature is very difficult. However, this factor is contained in this report as it was a repeated allegation which featured in reports received by the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition and other civil society reporting centres during the week. In addition, on 5 June 2003 SW Radio Africa featured an interview with Highfields MP Pearson Mungofa which also discussed this worrying trend.
37. This was first reported by the MDC Information Department on 4 June 2003, and was independently confirmed in *The Daily News* on 5 June 2003, in *The Standard* on 8 June 2003 and in the international press.
38. See *The Daily News* 6 June 2003.
39. This was similar to the behaviour exhibited by police who disrupted the funeral wake of Tonderai Machiridza, who died on April 18, 2003, from injuries sustained when he was assaulted in police custody.
40. This incident was reported by SW Radio Africa on 5 June 2003.
41. This incident was widely reported in the independent press, and was independently confirmed by members of the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, including representatives from the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum.

the Police Act, the Constitution of Zimbabwe and international norms and standards of policing and the use of force. The most worrying aspect of this brutality is its partisan nature, and the implicit indications of the increasing politicisation of the uniformed forces.

During the week, copies of the independent *Daily News* were torn into shreds and strewn across the streets in Harare and other towns in Zimbabwe by bands of ruling party supporters including youths and para-military groups<sup>42</sup>. These groups generally harassed and threatened any person they found in possession of *The Daily News*.



Members of the ZRP “serve and protect” Harare residents during the mass action.

Photo by AP

#### 5.4 Students

Students have long been perceived as “enemies of the state,” and repression of students has become commonplace. At the Harare Polytechnic, six student leaders were arrested on the weekend before the mass action and held until the evening of Monday June 2. While in police custody, they were questioned regarding their connections with the MDC. When they denied any such connection, they were beaten on the soles of their feet and further interrogated<sup>43</sup>.

#### 5.3 Journalistic Freedom

Attempts by the ruling party to silence voices of dissent were not limited to demonstrators. On Monday June 2, two journalists were attacked in the Harare suburb of Mt Pleasant when they went to cover a story about students at the UZ. They were assaulted, driven back into town, and taken to the police station. Rather than detaining the people who had attacked and abducted these journalists, the police transported the two journalists back to their office, seized some material belonging to the radio station, and held it over night. The material was later returned.

Students at the University of Zimbabwe in Harare witnessed new levels of intimidation on Monday June 2, 2003<sup>44</sup>. Students gathered on the UZ campus on Monday morning, with the intention of marching into town. However, they were met with a line of riot police who fired repeated rounds of teargas at them. The students returned to their hostels, where they assumed they would be left in peace.

Instead, police continued to patrol the campus in their vehicles. The ZNA brought two water cannons on to campus, and drove these between the hostels, firing water at the

42. This allegation was reported several times in *The Daily News* and was condemned by the Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA) on 3 June 2003. Members of the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition observed shredded copies of the newspaper littering the streets of Harare, a fact which further supports these allegations.

43. This encounter was reported by the Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU) and was confirmed by independent investigations and interviews by the Crisis Coalition.

44. The events at the University of Zimbabwe were reported in the independent press, including SW Radio Africa 2 June 2003, *The Daily News Special Edition*, 2 June 2003 and *The Daily News*, 3 June 2003. In addition, members of the Coalition confirmed these incidents independently through interviews with students who experienced this brutality first hand.



trees and over the roofs of the hostels, in a move clearly designed to intimidate the students. The police fired teargas into the hostels in order to force the students out. In several hostels, when the students refused to leave their rooms, members of the ZRP and ZNA moved up and down the corridors banging on doors, forcing them open, and even breaking them down in some instances in order to gain access to the students.

The hapless students were forced to lie on the floors of the corridors, and made to crawl outside to an open space, where members of the uniformed forces assaulted them repeatedly. When the police realised that they did not have enough space in their vehicles to ferry all of the students into police custody, they allowed the students to go. However, 20 students were reportedly detained following this raid on campus, and 41 students were treated for injuries they sustained during this attack<sup>45</sup>.



*This door in Manfred Hostel at the UZ was beaten in by the police on June 2, 2003.*

**Photo by Crisis Coalition**

### 5.5 Primary and Secondary Schools

Primary and secondary schools were also particular targets for violence during the week of June 2-6. This represents a disturbing development as it indicates a disregard for the political innocence of children, and a disrespect for their need to learn and live in a safe and healthy environment.

In Warren Park, police fired teargas at a primary school where children were waiting for their teachers, many of whom had stayed away<sup>46</sup>. In Glen Norah, four teachers at Glen Norah Two High School were taken to hospital for treatment when they were assaulted with batons by suspected Zanu PF youths for allegedly not holding lessons<sup>47</sup>. From this school, the youths allegedly went to nearby Kudakwashe Primary School, where they assaulted the headmaster. In Mbare, school children were attacked by pro-government actors when they were coming from school<sup>48</sup>. In Masvingo, four unknown people carrying *sjamboks* allegedly attacked Runyararo Primary School and stormed into classrooms beating up teachers and school children<sup>49</sup>. In Snake Park, Harare, so-called war veterans occupied Lilfordia School after they learned that the school had closed for the stay away<sup>50</sup>. The occupiers left after one night at the school, following discussions with the school leadership, who informed them that the private school had chosen to close out of fears for the safety of its students.

### 5.6 Churches

Freedom of worship is one of the fundamental tenets of Zimbabwe's Constitution. However, even churches were not safe from intimidation by members of the state security forces during the week of mass action. In Bulawayo, a ZAOGA pastor reported that members of the ZNA had entered the hall where he was performing a

45. Members of ZINASU reported that the UZ Dean of Students is in possession of a list of the 41 students who were hospitalised following this attack.
46. See *Business Day*, 4 June 2003.
47. See *The Daily News*, 6 June 2003.
48. This was reported on SW Radio Africa, 3 June, 2003.
49. See *The Daily News*, 5 June 2003.
50. This was reported in *The Herald*, 4 June 2003 and on SW Radio Africa on June 5 2003.

service and had disrupted it<sup>51</sup>. The soldiers instructed him that he should not conduct services in the future. The pastor sought assistance from his fellow clergymen.

Also in Bulawayo, outspoken Catholic Archbishop Pius Ncube and Christians Together for Peace and Justice organised an interdenominational prayer meeting on Friday June 2. While such meetings are not restricted by POSA, members of the ZRP and the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) arrived at the cathedral and questioned Archbishop Ncube about the service<sup>52</sup>. They instructed him that no political party regalia should be worn, and that inflammatory statements or political slogans would not be allowed. The Archbishop advised them that while the meeting was not specific to any party, issues of politics could not be separated from prayer directed towards healing the nation. Armed policemen patrolled grounds outside the cathedral but allowed the service to go ahead. This invasion of the privacy of religious institutions is a startling and unwelcome development in Zimbabwe's decline.

### 5.7 *Business*

Observers agreed that, overall, the stay-away element of the June 2-6 mass action generated the most extensive business closure Zimbabwe has experienced. In particular, the first day of the stay away saw businesses across the country closed, either as a demonstration of solidarity, or out of fears that violence would erupt. As the week progressed, many businesses opened. Some did so of their own

volition, but many were forced to open by state agents<sup>53</sup>.

In Banket, the Minister of Local Government and Housing, Ignatius Chombo, held a rally the weekend before the stay away, threatening specific shopkeepers that they should open. One of these shopkeepers did open, and when the police came to check on him, they found his shop open and a small trickle of customers. They later called him to the police station and held him overnight in Chinhoyi, even though he had been opened. They advised him that there had not been enough workers there, and instructed him to return to his shop and order the remainder of his workers to report for duty<sup>54</sup>. In Masvingo, Bulawayo and Mutare, it was reported that managers from various businesses were taken from their homes by members of the state security forces and ordered to open. They were further advised to instruct their workers to report for duty, or else risk losing their licences<sup>55</sup>. News reports since the end of the mass action indicate that government may indeed go ahead with plans to prosecute businesses, transport operators and even teachers who chose to participate in the stay away<sup>56</sup>. This criminalisation of citizens' right to protest is anti-democratic and should be censured by all democratic and freedom-loving individuals and governments.

51. This incident was reported by the Humanitarian Helplines Information Centre, 5 June 2003, and was confirmed by the Crisis Coalition.

52. See *The Daily News* on June 7, *The Standard*, June 8. This incident was independently confirmed by individuals who attended the service.

53. On Monday June 2, the Minister responsible for Trade and Industry, Samuel Mumbengegwi, told the nation on the ZBC TV Main News bulletin that government would withdraw trading licences for all businesses that remained closed during the week of mass action. There were intimations that, contrary to the Labour Relations Act and the Constitution of Zimbabwe, government would either force all businesses to open, deal with non-conforming managers or de-register affected companies. These illegal threats were made notwithstanding the fact that business licences are issued by Local Authorities, and regulate when businesses must *close* (e.g. on Sundays, or late at night), not when they must *open*. In addition, insurance in Zimbabwe does not cover damage arising from political riots. Thus in real terms, opening ones business when a riot is reasonably anticipated is an imprudent risk, and the only effective insurance is closure.

54. This incident was reported on SW Radio on 3 June 2003, and was independently confirmed by the Crisis Coalition.

55. See for example *The Daily News* 4 June, 2003.

56. See in particular *The Herald*, June 10, 2003.

## 6. Critical Overview

While the MDC's call for a stay away from June 2-6 was well heeded, extensive state repression clearly had an effect on the willingness and capacity of many individuals to participate in other aspects of the week of action. Indeed, the aggressive role of the military and police may largely account for the non-occurrence of anticipated mass demonstrations across the country.

These factors notwithstanding, the question of the preparedness of the pro-democracy movement to engage in mass demonstrations needs to be interrogated. There is a further need to reflect on four critical factors (from civil society's perspective) that might also serve to explain the shortcomings of "the final push."

### 6.1 Objectives

The end game of the "final push" was blurred in the messaging. While repeated advertisements in the private press, flyers and posters informed Zimbabweans that some action was imminent, communication of the specific objectives of this action was less consistent.

Advertisements inserted by the MDC in the weeks before the action featured a cartoon of Mugabe being chased by a crowd led by Tsvangirai, which was accompanied by messages about the "countdown to the final push"<sup>57</sup>. This could have led many readers to believe that "the final push" was about chasing Mugabe out of State House, or forcing him out of office.

As the action dawned, the objectives of the "final push" became clearer. One advertisement urged Zimbabweans to "*stay calm and peaceful as we engage in the on-going campaign to encourage Zanu PF to come to a serious negotiating table and resolve*

*the national crisis*"<sup>58</sup>. Still another featured an extensive message to Zimbabweans, reminding them of the current crisis and urging people to "*take part in nation wide peaceful protest marches for democracy and good governance to encourage Zanu PF to take dialogue seriously*"<sup>59</sup>. These adverts also called for a week-long stay away and urged peaceful, disciplined and courageous action. In the last few days of the mass action, the MDC stated that "D-Day" would be on Friday June 6. It advised people that "*the dictatorship has stopped caring about your life. Now the time has come for you to defend yourself. Claim your democratic rights. Claim your sovereign power. Claim your voice*"<sup>60</sup>. The MDC urged people to "protest peacefully—march for your freedom" and announced that there would be marches at all major city centres. It was unclear, however, how such marches would proceed, in what way these demonstrations would yield dialogue, and what demands the MDC was making on such dialogue.

Civil society leaders, in the weeks leading up to the "final push," had maintained that mass pressure should lead to multi-stakeholder dialogue which would develop a transitional authority. Furthermore, this position was debated and adopted by the MDC shortly before the mass action. However, mere days before the commencement of "the final push," the MDC released a statement which indicated that transition should occur in terms of the current defective Constitution of Zimbabwe<sup>61</sup>. In other words, it recommended that Mugabe should step down from office and allow new elections to be held within 90 days of his resignation. This sent mixed messages to civil society, as it smacked of "power first, principle later."

The fact that this was announced only days before the action made it difficult for civil society to remind the MDC of its previous

57. See *The Daily News*, 16 May and 30 May 2003.

58. See *The Daily News*, 31 May 2003.

59. See *The Daily News*, 2 June 2003.

60. See *The Daily News*, 5 June 2003.

61. See "Remarks by the MDC President at a meeting with the G8 Ambassadors," 27 May 2003, MDC Department of Information and Publicity

commitments to a transitional phase. Moreover, heavy-handed state repression made it difficult for CSOs to determine if the statement had been made as a genuine policy position, or as a calculated stance from which the MDC would be able to begin negotiations. Ultimately, because both the MDC and civil society continued to announce their different positions through the press, an honest discussion about the differences of their perspective on the way forward was compromised.

### 6.2 *Timing*

Some organisers within the MDC maintained that Zimbabweans could not wait a minute longer for mass action, particularly given that more than a year had passed since the disputed Presidential Elections in March 2003. In addition, it was argued that the sharp increase in the cost of living and the rampant shortages of basic commodities, including fuel and cash favoured an earlier action. Others, however, questioned if the majority of the population was ready for the demonstration aspect of the action (as opposed to only a stay away) which the MDC sought to introduce. While the MDC should be commended for taking care to ensure that its action coincided with payday for most Zimbabweans, the fact that there was such little cash in circulation at the time mooted that concern. The assumption was that the task of mobilisation would be simple and clear-cut. This is evident in the confidence of the title “the final push,” which led many Zimbabweans to believe that the week of action would be the final tactic necessary to bring Mugabe to the negotiating table.

### 6.3 *Form and Content*

Press advertisements that appeared in the independent press starting from the Thursday before the week of action called for a week-long stay away and unspecified action. Announcements in the press and via mobile phone short message service (SMS) on the weekend before June 2 called for people to gather on that day in an unspecified location in the city centre of their own areas. Advertisements and messages before the “D

Day” demonstrations scheduled for June 6 were more clear about the venue, but did not specify the time people were to gather.

As discussed above, the MDC had legitimate concerns regarding security and infiltration which influenced its decision to be vague about the specific form, content and timing of the action. This, however, contributed to some frustration among activists who wanted to participate in demonstrations but who were not sure what was expected of them. While everyone knew to be looking for *something*, beyond the stay away, many people were not sure exactly what that would be.

It was also not clear whether the intention was to demonstrate in town, or to march to the State House (in Harare, at least). In the unlikely event that the protestors were permitted to arrive at State House, it was not clear what they would have done there, or how they would have progressed had they been welcomed by Mugabe. Moreover, it remained unclear exactly how these demonstrations would persuade Mugabe to the negotiating table. In the end, the multi-layered ambivalence provided many people with a convenient excuse to stay at home.

### 6.4 *Coordination and Communication*

Strategic coordination with civil society organisations (CSO’s) was limited, and many CSO’s read about the date and activities of the mass action in the independent press.

During the stay away, the following issues remained unresolved:

- The pre-mature announcement to the press of the intended action and assumed organisers<sup>62</sup>;
- Clarity on how (if at all) strategies to counter anticipated state repression would be communicated to the generality of the public;
- Methods for ordinary citizens to access information in their localities (particularly

62. See *The Daily News*, 19 May 2003 and the above section 3.1, *Civil Society’s Perspective*.



given the reduced access to the independent media as discussed above);

- The method through which interested individuals would identify party leadership at various strategic points;
- The role (if any) of civil society organisations in mobilising support for the mass action.
- Methods for ensuring accountability and measuring effectiveness of the action, both across sectors and within specific regions of the country;
- Communication with civil society, particularly regarding strategies to account for and assist the victims of state repression, including medical, legal and humanitarian support.



*Across the country, major businesses such as this Harare supermarket closed during the June 2-6 week of mass action.*

**Photo by Crisis Coalition**

## 7. Conclusion

The violence witnessed within Zimbabwe the week of June 2-6 is chilling. The emerging patterns discussed in this report are cause for grave concern. Following a relatively peaceful stay away called by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), many activists believed that the state had realised the long-term non-viability of a violent strategy, and had decided to allow peaceful demonstrations to occur. Clearly, this impression was naïve and premature.

Through its reaction to a week of non-violent protests called by the opposition party, the ruling party has demonstrated its unbending resolve to rule the country, even by force. The politicisation of the uniformed forces, and the use of para-military groups as agents of state repression against fellow Zimbabweans must be condemned. Further, the state must be censured for its continued use of repressive legislation such as POSA and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) by the state to stifle legitimate democratic dissent.

In the face of this state-sponsored repression, broad and inclusive dialogue is necessary to bring a resolution to Zimbabwe's multi-layered crisis. However, pro-democracy activists, members of the opposition, and human rights advocates alike must recognise that the road to the negotiating table will not be smooth or easy. The fact remains that the continued polarisation of Zimbabwean society into camps of enemies rather than communities of fellow citizens is dangerous to the country's social and economic development. As the gulf widens between pro-establishment and pro-democracy groups, Zimbabwe continues to burn. It is therefore incumbent upon civil society organisations, business leaders, faith based organisations, human rights activists, media practitioners, opposition parties and other concerned constituencies within Zimbabwe and the

region to ensure an amiable resolution of the Zimbabwe crisis in order to reverse the spiraling humanitarian disaster and limit its contagion effect on the entire region.

Despite the retribution which has resulted from "the final push," Zimbabweans should celebrate the fact that they did achieve something entirely impressive.

Critically, the stay away provided an opportunity for people to demonstrate their discontent. Businesses sacrificed massive loss of profits, and workers risked being fired from their jobs to participate in the stay away. The fact that the opposition leader can call on employers and workers alike to close their businesses, and have this call to action heeded nation wide for five full days—despite intimidation and recrimination by the ruling party—is a powerful testimony to the considerable influence the MDC wields.

It is estimated that the ruling party spent over \$2 billion on the largest internal military campaign Zimbabwe has experienced<sup>63</sup>. In addition, some analysts speculate that the massive outpouring of resources by the state to "defend" itself against the mass action drew down its reserves to a critical level. This reaction of the armed regime against its unarmed citizens provides one indication of the potential of an organised, well-planned and thoroughly communicated mass action to threatened and confront the regime.

Thus, while the June 2-6 stay away was arguably the largest general strike witnessed in Southern Africa in recent times<sup>64</sup>, the mass demonstrations aspect of "the final push" was largely a victim of state repression. However, even in the face of this repression, the MDC dangerously oversimplified the problem in its mass communications. Many people entered the week of June 2-6 naively hoping that one decisive week of action would cause an entrenched and determined

63. See *The Standard*, 8 June 2003. It is estimated that \$2 billion of tax payers' money was spent on equipment such as bullets, teargas, fuel, and on payments for the army, the police, war veterans and the youth militia.

64. See *The Standard*, 15 June 2003.

regime to lay down its arms and concede to negotiations. While psychologically it was important to motivate Zimbabweans that their commitment to mass action could yield an immediate and tangible result, this strategy delivered unrealistic expectations of a swift and decisive victory for the pro-democracy movement. Herein lies the challenge for pro-democracy forces, namely how to maintain realistic expectations of an action while motivating constituents and providing hope to the nation.

The “final push” was not a failure. Nor does it represent a step backwards. Instead, its strengths and its shortcomings alike must be carefully and rationally analysed, and compared to its objectives. Pro-democracy activists across the spectrum must be clear about the desired results of their actions, and develop effective strategies consistent with these aims. If the objective is to bring Mugabe (and Zanu PF) to the negotiating table to discuss the terms of his resignation and the mandate of a transitional authority, mass action may or may not be the most effective strategy. Rather than pointing fingers, passing blame or decrying state repression, the aftermath of the “final push” should be viewed as an opportunity to debate both the objectives of the democratic struggle and the most effective strategies to achieve those goals.

The collective frustration of a people ready to defend their rights and insist on good governance is a powerful force. With greater coordination and careful strategising, this will easily become the most important tool in the struggle to achieve a democratic Zimbabwe.



## Sources

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Email</b>	<b>URL</b>
The Daily News	editor@dailynews.co.zw	www.dailynews.co.zw
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