

Address by Mr Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of Zimbabwe's opposition Movement for Democratic Change, to the Foreign Correspondents' Association of Southern Africa, February 13, 2008

Good morning and thank you.

I'm sure you saw in the news yesterday that Simba Makoni was formally expelled from Zanu-PF. I would like to be among the first to welcome Mr. Makoni to the ranks of the opposition in Zimbabwe.

Opposition leaders in Zimbabwe face arrest, beatings, tear gas, treason trials—and the shock of seeing their candidates and supporters murdered. Mr. Makoni knows this—he's seen it from the safety of the Zanu Politburo. He may soon experience it first hand.

Now that he is no longer Zanu-PF, I also wish Mr. Makoni well in founding a political party.

Democracies usually have more than one democratic party — that is to be expected.

Zimbabwe, of course, is not a democracy. It is a dictatorship. South African President Thabo Mbeki, supported by the other leaders of SADC, worked for nearly a year, attempting to open more democratic space in Zimbabwe.

He has not succeeded, therefore it is not a correct assessment of the situation in Zimbabwe when he says “the parties involved in the dialogue have reached full agreement on all matters relating to the substantive matters the parties had to address.”

Nothing has changed. Just this past weekend. An MDC rally, legal in any democracy and now legal in Zimbabwe, was broken up by armed riot police in the town of Kadoma. Changes in the law, negotiated by President Mbeki, have not changed the behavior of the dictatorship. Democratic political campaigns are not permitted in Zimbabwe.

Everyone must respond to the reality of what Zimbabwe is today.

Simba Makoni has taken a courageous stand. He participated on the Zanu-PF politburo while the hopes of liberation were squandered, while our economy was destroyed, while a quarter of our population has fled. He stood by and said nothing.

But he has finally opened his eyes.

He has finally heard the weeping of the mothers, watching their children starve, he has seen those dying without medical treatment. We hope that others in Zanu will follow his lead; that others from Zanu-PF will take a stand.

The military officers, the intelligence agents, the riot police — they too are now seeing their relatives starve. They can follow the example of Makoni, break with the dictatorship. They have the motivation; they have an example; I pray that they also have the courage.

The most important thing that the reformers in Zanu-PF can do for the people of Zimbabwe is to honestly count the votes the people cast on March 29.

They can break up our meetings; they can beat our supporters, they can arrest the starving and persecute the dying. But if they count the votes actually cast, the MDC will win and Zimbabwe's nightmare will end on March 29.

We also need to see a little courage from Thabo Mbeki. He can break with his policy of quiet support for the dictatorship in Zimbabwe. He owes it to our common African humanity; he owes it to his own people — who are seeing refugees streaming into their cities, taking their jobs, crowding their cities, dying on their streets.

Thabo Mbeki can add his voice to those demanding free and fair elections in Zimbabwe. He can do it without taking the risks that we are taking. He won't be arrested, tear gassed, beaten; he won't be charged with treason, he won't see his supporters killed.

Only a little courage is required — the courage to speak the unpleasant truth; the courage to see what is before him.

President Mbeki, if you won't do it for us, if you won't do it for Africa, do it for your own country. Do it for your legacy. You have invited the world to see what freedom and democracy has done for South Africa for the World cup. Do not allow your South Africa to be overwhelmed by the tragedy of Zimbabwe.

As for me, and the MDC, we have decided what we will do.

We are a democratic political party. Recognizing that we confront a dictatorship, we will nevertheless contest this election. We are running to win.

Myself together with the comrades in the presidential, parliamentary, senatorial and local government elections are running to win.

For the last few weeks I have been around the country on a listening tour. I have been there under a tree, in small little huts, at the dip tank and in the various communal fields.

What the people have been saying to me is that they are having to walk for many miles because of the unavailability of transport. They have to go for days without eating a single meal.

On this listening tour I have been witnessing unprecedented cases of deepening poverty, collapse of general infrastructure and the desperation with which people have tried everything possible in order to survive. I was touched by the sincerity of their desperation.

Ironically people were not talking about parliamentary seats, senatorial seats or an opportunity to go to the state house. I agree with them, that the focus of this campaign and indeed the ideals of our struggle is how we can solve the people's problems.

We intend on the 23rd of February 2008, to unveil our manifesto and our plans to reverse the current decline that is a product of Zanu-PF misrule in the last thirty years.

The Movement for Democratic Change was born out of the failure by Zanu-PF to implement the ideals of the liberation struggle, in particular the extension of freedoms to

all as well as economic emancipation of Zimbabweans.

The working people's convention of February 1999 laid the foundation for our historic movement and placed in our hands the peoples mandate to deliver change and usher in a new government that is accountable to the people.

The recent people's convention has reaffirmed the desire of the people of Zimbabwe for meaningful rather than cosmetic change. We are with them.

Since then we have been in the trenches of this democratic struggle. We have relentlessly pursued and continue to pursue every peaceful and democratic avenue available in order to find a solution to the crisis our country has been plunged into by Zanu-PF.

Following months of the SADC led negotiations between us and Zanu-PF, we still have not found conditions sufficient to guarantee a free and fair election. Mugabe and Zanu-PF have never been sincere in the pursuit of democracy in this country, instead choosing to defend power at all costs.

We believe the election scheduled for the 29th of March 2008, however uneven the playing field may be, presents Zimbabweans with a fighting chance, to remove this dictatorship.

The people won in the election of 2000, they won in the election of 2002 and in that of 2005.

The people will win in the election of 2008 and should Robert Mugabe choose to steal their victory he would have consumed that last shred of legitimacy left for his dictatorship in the region and in the world.

The people of Zimbabwe are desperate for change. They have endured years of suffering in abject poverty. Inflation is soaring at 25 000 percent, further increasing the scourge of poverty.

Unemployment is now above 90% in particular the urban and rural working poor have now been excluded from this economy.

The air in our country is dense with the stench of poverty. Our health sector has collapsed and death has come sooner for our young people due to the scourge of the AIDS pandemic. 1.5 million children are not in school.

The people of Zimbabwe are looking to us to deliver them to a new Zimbabwe. A new Zimbabwe will give them an opportunity to make a new beginning. We are the agents of change. Indeed we provide the dawn of a new era.

What this country needs is a fresh start. This country needs transformation, that is, a total paradigm shift from the culture of Zanu-PF that has been institutionalized and entrenched in our society.

A reform agenda will not deliver us as a people; it will simply perpetuate the status quo where the elite in Zanu-PF continue to plunder the country's meager resources while we

the people suffer.

Our people need hope. Our people need a leadership that will never betray them, a leadership that will include them and consult them and not make elite pacts as a way of resolving this crisis.

Our people need a leadership they have worked with since the beginning of our democratic struggle. We are that leadership and we wish to take this opportunity to renew our covenant with the people and commit ourselves to the ideals and aspirations of every Zimbabwean.

Some day a free and Democratic Zimbabwe will have many democratic parties.

Today, although there are many democratic leaders, there is only one truly national, Democratic Party.

We are ready to oppose the Zanu-PF dictatorship across the length and breadth of Zimbabwe. We have candidates in every part of our nation, drawn from every background, united in a common cause, and running to win.

Together we can deliver a new Zimbabwe. Now is the time.