

Refusing to be Co-opted? Church Organizations and Reconciliation in Zimbabwe with Special Reference to the Christian Alliance of Zimbabwe 2005 - 2013

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Abstract

Zimbabwe, throughout its history, has had a culture of violence and impunity which has resulted in massive displacements of people, murder, physical and traumatic memories of the past. In all the epochs of violence, it is worth noting that some church organizations were vocal and castigated the politicians whilst others were either indifferent or had been 'co-opted' by the political parties. By 2008, the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) had lost its hegemony to the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and in 2009 a government of national unity was formed at the instigation of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU) after witnessing unprecedented violence against the people during the 2008 elections. When the unity government was formed in 2009, an Organ of National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration was also formed to try and bring Zimbabweans together for healing and reconciliation.

This study investigates why some church organizations have criticized political violence and participated in national healing and reconciliation while others are either co-opted by the political parties or have remained neutral. This paper will focus on the role played by the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA) in the national healing program prior to and after the formation of the unity government. The ZCA has been lobbying politicians to campaign peacefully, while at the same time housing and counseling the victims of political violence among other activities. The ZCA's role will be contrasted

to that of Reverend Obadiah Musindo's Destiny for Africa Network (DFAN) which is pro-ZANU-PF and campaigns for Mugabe, whom the church likens to the biblical Moses. It also attacks those churches that criticize ZANU-PF's violence. The research was premised on primary data to obtain a voice from the churches concerned and the politicians on what role they see the church playing in politics and reconciliation in the country.

Keywords: National healing, MDC, ZANU-PF, Government of National Unity, Zimbabwe Christian Alliance, Destiny for Africa Network, churches, violence, reconciliation

Introduction

This paper is about the role of faith based organisations (FBOs) in the reconciliation and healing programme in Zimbabwe during the crisis that started around 2000. It is an analysis of how they interacted with the state and an assessment of why some faith based organisations were co-opted whilst others became radical and challenged the state to stop violence and engage in concrete steps to reconcile and heal Zimbabweans.

Since 2000, Zimbabwe has been going through a period that scholars have aptly labeled as a period of crisis. Many scholars have written on and about this period of 'crisis'¹ and what has emerged is that there are many crises that have stalked Zimbabwe. According to these scholars, the Zimbabwean crisis has manifested itself on issues such as the land issue and property rights, the struggle over the past, trade unions, human rights and constitutional questions, struggle for democracy among other issues². The political crisis in Zimbabwe has on its own generated further crises such as the health, water, food, cash, fuel and energy crises. As Chiumbu and Musemwa (2012: x) argues, these crises deserves an independent internal analysis and a critical assessment of how they related to others. This work looks at one such crisis involving the church on the one hand and the state on the other. Acknowledging that the political crisis especially, characterised by state sponsored violence left Zimbabwe deeply divided and in need of reconcil-

¹ Hammer & Raftopoulos (2003); Jones (2010); Gatsheni-Ndlovu (2003); Raftopoulos (2009).

² Chiumbu & Musemwa (2012: p. ix).

iation. This article problematises the relationship between the state and radical faith based organisations that worked to promote healing and reconciliation whilst seemingly challenging the authority of the state. The activities of such radical organisations will be contrasted to that of those organisations that campaigned for the state and turned a blind eye to the violent activities of the state. Such organisations, the paper questions whether they have been co-opted or they are taking their own initiatives in playing such controversial role in the Zimbabwean crisis. Specifically, this article compares and contrasts the Christian Alliance of Zimbabwe and Reverend Obadiah Musindo's Destiny for Africa Network. It argues that in its attempt to reconcile and heal the nation, the Christian Alliance has often run into serious problems with the state that construe this organisation's role as subversive and confrontational. In contrast, the same state also works in cahoots with other religious organisation not only to thwart attempts at reconciliation and healing, but also cover up the violence perpetrated by the state. The paper concludes that the state plays a pivotal role in shaping its relations with the church, although not taking away agency from these religious organisations under study. Thus any attempts at reconciliation, its successes and failures as this paper will show hinges upon the willingness of the state.

An increasingly common feature of attempts at transition to democratic politics is the creation of some sort of truth and reconciliation process (Gibson 2006: 408). Reconciliation can give rise to the consolidation of democratic change through several specific processes related to the reduction of intergroup conflict (Gibson 2006: 415). The truth and reconciliation process can free a society from its obsession with past injustices, redirecting political debate to contemporary issues. This section attempts to lay the background to the Zimbabwean crisis that has led to violence and the need for reconstruction, reconciliation and healing in the country. It briefly gives a history of the country since 1980 culminating in the crisis of the 2000s, a 'decade of madness'. It accounts for the failure of the reconciliation process propagated by the politicians, whilst laying the foundation for the involvement by faith based organisations such as the Christian Alliance in preaching reconciliation.

The word reconciliation and what it entails is not new to the Zimbabwean people. On 17 April 1980 in Harare, the then Prime Minister and currently President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe introduced a policy of reconciliation towards all the warring parties in the Zimbabwe conflict. In his

reconciliation speech Mugabe said:

Henceforth you and I must strive to adapt ourselves, intellectually and spiritually to the reality of our political change and relate to each other as brothers bound one to another by a bond of comradeship. If yesterday I fought you as an enemy, today you have become a friend and ally with the same national interests, loyalty, rights and duties as myself. If yesterday you hated me, today you cannot avoid the love that binds you to me and me to you. Is it not folly, therefore, that in these circumstances anybody should seek to revive the wounds and grievances of the past? The wrongs of the past must now stand forgiven and forgotten (Raftopoulos 2004: x).

The concept of reconciliation in the effort to rebuild Zimbabwe became the key element of Mugabe's rule in the 1980s. However, as Mawondo (2008: 7) notes, this reconciliation was called for even before the basic injustices that had caused the war in the first place had been fully addressed. For example, he highlights the fact that unequal land distribution which was the main reason why the Africans fought the settler regime and yet nothing was done to make them regain their lost heritage. According to Sachikonye (2004: 1), the policy of reconciliation therefore was a well-calculated rhetoric on the part of the new administration to allay fears that the white population had at the time. Sachikonye argues that indeed there were no 'Nuremburg trials' or witch-hunts of the former oppressors in the 1980s, but in due course there was fanning of racial hatred and appropriation of white property (Sachikonye 2004: 1). The land invasions which started in 2000 aptly demonstrate the superficiality of this façade of reconciliation.

Besides the land question, the problem of reconciliation can also be noted in the civil war of the 1980s between the government and the rebels in Matabeleland Provinces where unfortunately 20 000 civilians are reported to have lost their lives at the hands of the government forces. Raftopoulos argues that the reconciliation policy after this was totally based on the government's subordination of and control of other political parties and of civil society. He notes that the mid-1980s crisis in Matabeleland and the violent state response to it displayed a number of traits that would mark the authoritarian statism of the post-2000 period (Raftopoulos 2004: xi). The outcome

of this crisis was a Unity Agreement which effectively silenced and crushed the major opposition to ZANU-PF's goals of making a one-party state.

The crisis in Matabeleland has sowed seeds of hatred and mutual mistrust between Mugabe's ZANU-PF and the Ndebele speakers who felt that it was genocide. Up to this day, the people of Matabeleland are clamouring for justice and compensation. The people in Matabeleland consistently refer to the violence of the 1980s as far worse than that of the liberation war:

We can still be eliminated at anytime...this wound is huge and deep The liberation war was painful, but it had a purpose, it was planned, face to face. The war that followed was much worse. It was fearful, unforgettable and unacknowledged (CCJP 1997: 60).

This shows that the rhetoric of unity preached by ZANU-PF has not been accepted by the people as it is evidently one-sided. While perpetrators were rewarded with amnesty, victims to date are still to be compensated and the full truth of these years has not been told, and without truth most victims are finding it hard to put the events behind them and move on (Eppel 2004: 47).

The knowledge we have of the crisis in Matabeleland can be attributed to the role of faith based organisations, particularly the Zimbabwe Catholic Justice Commission for Peace, which documented the massacres and even recorded oral statements from the victims and the survivors. The report was published in 1997 and marked a change in state-church relations in post-independent Zimbabwe. Indeed the church had become increasingly worried about the political and economic melt-down in the country towards the end of the 1990s and the desire to carry out constitutional reforms. Masengwe (2008: 40) argues that just before the publication of *Breaking the Silence* in 1997 by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) and the Legal Resources Foundation (LRF), the Zimbabwe Council of Churches initiated the formation of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) to spearhead the constitutional revision process in Zimbabwe.

Theoretical Perspective

Religious individuals and faith-based organisations, as carriers of religious ideas, can play important roles, not only as a source of conflict but also as a

tool for conflict resolution and peace-building, providing early warnings of conflict, good offices once conflict has erupted, and contributing to advocacy, mediation and reconciliation (Haynes 2009: 52). This study uses the concept of African Christianity and its public role as enunciated by Paul Gifford in his 2008 study. Gifford's work is an attempt to map out and contextualise the involvement of Africa's churches in the public sphere through case studies of countries like Zambia, Ghana, Cameroon and Uganda among others. Gifford situates his study by first analysing the context of two countries; namely Liberia and Rwanda which claimed to be Christian countries though some church members were part of the structures of oppression masking the injustices that contributed powerfully to the near-destruction of the two countries (Gifford 2008: 53-54). This role of the churches in Rwanda and Liberia has generated debates and curiosity about the public role of Christianity in Africa; and this has formed the basis of this present study. By studying the Christian Alliance of Zimbabwe, a grouping of churches that are evidently anti-ZANU-PF; and the Destiny for Africa Network which is pro-ZANU-PF, this study uses the concept of the church's public role to discuss violence and national healing issues in Zimbabwean politics. This research is also premised on Ranger's assertion that Africa's religious movements are eminently political (Ranger 1986: 51). This work therefore tries to look at the activities of these two religious organisations and how politics is affected by their work in so far as conflict resolution and reconciliation is concerned. This study therefore contributes to the debates on the roles of the church in politics.

Church and State in Zimbabwe: Mutual Bedfellows or Implacable Foes?

A number of scholarly works on church-state relations have been produced³. The colonization of Zimbabwe was in many ways aided by missionaries who signed treaties with African rulers. Later during colonial rule, the church represented by missionaries often worked together with the state in their so-

³ Hallencreutz & Moyo (2986); Banana (1996); Auret (1992); Dachs & Rea (1979); Linden (1980); Randolph (1985); Mclaughlin (1996); Hallencreutz (1998); Maxwell (1999).

called civilizing missions, particularly the provision of education to Africans. Though conflicts would arise now and then between the church and the state, it was only on minor issues of how to control and subordinate Africans. During the liberation struggle, there began to appear different religious camps with different affiliations. For example, mainline churches like the Anglican heavily supported the colonial government, whilst others like the Roman Catholic supported the guerillas⁴. At independence, churches that were linked with the parties that opposed ZANU like Bishop Abel Muzorewa's Methodist were mistrusted, thus they had to openly support the government. Therefore, as the churches realigned themselves to get in good books with the state, it was only the Roman Catholic Church that openly castigated the government over its treatment of the people of Matabeleland during the conflict in the early 1980s. It was the Roman Catholic Church in collaboration with the Legal Resources Foundation that documents the human rights violations in that region. In 'breaking that silence', a new era in state-church relations began in Zimbabwe which would sometimes deteriorate to physical violence as the paper will show. However, as other churches became radical, others cooperated more with the government in the unfolding political and economic crisis beginning the late 1990s.

The continuing political and economic crisis of the late 1990s and early 2000s remarkably shaped the state-church relations. The church was becoming increasingly agitated by the state's apparent neglect of problems bedeviling the society of which members of the church were many. It is worth noting however that during the early days of the crisis, the church was largely divided over the politics of the state with some key players in the major churches drawn to Mugabe's nationalism, others towards the critical civic movement (Raftopoulos 2009: 227). Divisions within the church could also be noted in that congregations like the Pentecostals drew on their doctrines to 'make the best of rapid social change' without antagonizing the state (Maxwell 1998: 351). This relationship that ensued between the state and the church is sometimes characterised as neo-patrimonialism. In a neo-patrimonial state as Gifford (1998: 6) states, support is ensured by clientelism in which a superior provides security for an inferior, who as a client then provides political support for his patron. Thus in a patrimonial state, the state

⁴ For a more detailed explanation of the church-state relations during the liberation struggle see Maxwell (1995:112); Dorman (2001).

is expected to provide benefits in the form of jobs and development projects among other benefits. As Gifford (1998: 6) further points, the central figure works with local figures who are expected to broker between their communities and central government to pass benefits in both directions, and probably taking his share in the process. In the Zimbabwean case as the paper shows, some church leaders became such local figures who appropriated benefits from the state for themselves and their followers. This kind of patronage is seen in some circles as co-optation of the clergy to be mouth pieces of the ZANU-PF government. Thus the famous words of Bayart (1993: 188) become true in the Zimbabwean sense as he aptly noted concerning the African state: 'it was inevitable that ... [it] should attempt to absorb religious personalities who are suspected of having the ability to control the youth, and instill them with an alternative model of society'.

Therefore in an attempt to exacerbate the apparent divisions within the church, the presidency invited some church leaders to have lunch with Robert Mugabe at the state house in 2006. The late John Makumbe, a political scientist, social commentator, member of Faith Ministries and advisor to the Christian Alliance, argued that the lunch lasted for four hours and it resulted in a drive to gather the views of the people on what kind of Zimbabwe they wanted. Whilst to the unsuspecting this seemed a noble idea by the church and the state to work together to address the challenges facing Zimbabwe, the real aim was to emasculate the church as a threat to the state, since it had the capacity to mobilize people. After this meeting, there were growing suspicions that most of the eminent church leaders invited were given unlimited access to state resources to build churches, whilst others got cars, land and farms.

The document they produced after this gathering was termed *The Zimbabwe we Want* and three FBOs played a fundamental role in this venture. These are the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) and the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC)⁵. The main theme of the document was to provide a framework for social justice, peace and reconciliation, as well as rebuilding

⁵ But the ZCBC rejects the published version of the *Zimbabwe we Want* document, claiming that it left out some of their ideas whilst inserting ideas that were not agreed upon. As a result, without the support of the influential ZCBC, the paper remained a pipe dream.

the economy, society, and the state, and to restore destabilized achievements. However, the document wasn't well received by the people as they felt that the church leaders had been bribed by Mugabe to produce a document that sought to shift the blame away from the state. For example, the Christian Alliance claim that an earlier version of the document had called for the drafting of a new constitution by 2007 but this was conspicuously omitted in the final version⁶. At the launch of the document, Mugabe categorically stated that the discussion on the new constitution was a closed issue. Also contributing to the mild reception of the document is the fact that the MDC was never consulted on the final document. At the launch of *The Zimbabwe we Want* document, the Bishops confessed the sins of the church but the state kept quiet. The action of the church, with the inaction by the state, made one interpret the church's apology to the nation as an apology made on behalf of the state. This did not augur well with many people inside and outside the church because the failure of national reconciliation was not the sole responsibility of the church. In fact, many saw the Mugabe government being responsible for the chaos that reigned supreme in the country as they refused to relinquish power even when they had been 'defeated' by the MDC. However, bishop Manhanga in face of the criticism on the document insisted that it represented the views of the mainstream churches in Zimbabwe unlike the Christian Alliance that had no 'constituency'⁷.

Since the debacle of *The Zimbabwe we Want*, some church leaders have been lining up to support the policies of ZANU-PF, from the violent land redistribution, election campaigns and lately the indigenization programme. One such clergyman is the deposed Anglican Bishop Nolbert Kunonga who used his ZANU-PF connections to wrestle the Anglican Church from the original owners in 2005. Ever since, he has been at the forefront of praising the government's policies no matter how they alienate people. Kunonga had the support of the police who helped him consolidate his power as his supporters locked and gates to the St Mary's Cathedral in Harare so that the other faction led by Bishop Bakare and later Bishop Chad Gandiye, would have no access to the premises. Such a move affected the church's cash flow resulting in Kunonga turning churches into cell phone repair shops and schools for private lessons.

⁶ www.insiderzim.com/the-zimbabwe-we-want/

⁷ www.insiderzim.com/the-zimbabwe-we-want/

Another clergyman who has been campaigning for ZANU-PF openly is Reverend Obadiah Musindo of the Destiny for Africa Network (DFAN) which was formed in 2000. Rev Musindo calls himself an independent African theology student, a strong and staunch supporter of the violent land redistribution programme masterminded by ZANU-PF and the war veterans. He argues that his organization is a multid denominational organization formed to fight for black emancipation and empowerment. The land reform resulted in the death of about 100 white farmers and about 200 former farm workers⁸. He strongly argues that land restitution was in line with Biblical scriptures, making reference to the Old Testament as full of scriptures about land. Whilst most critics argue that Musindo is in ZANU-PF for both monetary gains and also for the purposes of dividing the church in Zimbabwe, Musindo had this to say:

The plain truth is that I did not support ZANU-PF and President Mugabe by accident. I had a divine prophecy of the revolutionary party and the president. When my organization came into being in 2000, the land programme brought it closer to ZANU-PF. We discovered in the Network that the land programme was more biblical than political. By taking the land back to Zimbabweans, President Mugabe became the modern black political and economic Moses and also revived the Martin Luther King spirit (*Daily Mirror* 8 Aug 2005).

Paradoxically, Musindo castigates some pastors for supposedly joining hands with the MDC, saying such pastors were agents of evil. He strongly believes that there is no such thing as being apolitical. He attacked some church leaders for claiming to be neutral when according to him they were friends of the opposition. In essence, the clergyman was intimating that supporting the MDC was a crime, and when ZANU-PF deployed its militias to beat the opposition, DFAN silently approved it. According to the Director of DFAN, there was no distinction between his organization and ZANU-PF as they basically pursued the same policies of empowering the people of

⁸ For more on scholarly work on the land reform see for example: Chaumba, Scoones & Wolmer (2003:4); Hammar, Raftopoulos & Jensen (2003); Moyo (2000); Sachikonye (2004); Sachikonye (2005); and Scoones (2010).

Zimbabwe⁹. As a result, churches seen to be against ZANU-PF are inevitably lumped together in the category of opposition parties. DFAN members believe that ZANU-PF was ordained by God to rule Zimbabwe and as such in the spirit of solidarity; all non-state actors should support it. As a result of this association, the DFAN has not castigated violence perpetrated by ZANU-PF because for all intents and purposes they are one organization.

Musindo and his group attacked clergymen Pius Ncube, Trevor Manhanga and Sebastian Bakare for condemning the violence that characterised the 2002 Presidential elections. Pius Ncube was the archbishop of the Roman Catholic in Matabeleland who criticized the government's treatment of the Ndebeles during Gukurahundi atrocities as well as the recent violence after 2000. Bishop Trevor Manhanga who at one time was a fierce critic of President Robert Mugabe was in 2003 lambasted alongside the Anglican Bishop of Manicaland, Sebastian Bakare by the Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs as 'MDC activists wearing religious collars'¹⁰. On 13 February 2003 Bishop Manhanga was arrested in Borrowdale in Harare where he had been invited to speak at a Crisis Coalition public meeting whose theme was: 'The Church: Resolving or Worsening the Zimbabwe Crisis'. Sebastian Bakare had also castigated the use of violence by the ruling party in the 2000 and 2002 elections. Musindo argued that when these clergymen condemned violence, they were always one sided accusing ZANU-PF of being violent and never questioning the other parties. He construed that to be political regardless of the fact that the elections had been condemned by the European Union and the international community as a sham for its violence directed at the MDC supporters and the white farmers (*The Voice* 13 Feb 2005). Together with the MDC, these churches were seen to be foreign funded to effect an illegal regime change in Zimbabwe¹¹. In 2004, before the ZCA had been formed, Musindo was already attacking the CCJP for being foreign funded. Musindo said

⁹ Interview with Piki (Director of DFAN), by author, 18 December 2011.

¹⁰ The Zimbabwe Situation, 2 August 2003 www.zimbabwesituation.com

¹¹ Indeed according to John Makumbe, the Christian Alliance receives all its funding for the various projects it does from foreign organisations, primarily Tearfund from Norway and other donors from Britain. However, there is no evidence to support Mugabe's views that these churches aims to remove his government from power. But the fact that such vocal churches are foreign

Blair made it clear that he and his lieutenants in Zimbabwe would not rest until they had effected what they call regime change in this country. Their local agents are making a lot of money from working for foreigners and it is only a matter of time before we expose to the world what we know about their dealings (*The Herald* 15 July 2004).

In the run-up to the 2008 harmonised elections, Obadiah Musindo was giving out stands to his supporters on the condition that they would vote for ZANU PF. In demonstrating the true neo-patrimonial relations between his organisation and ZANU PF, Musindo promised access to 800 stands to church members in the eastern border city of Mutare:

I am confident that my housing scheme will pull up votes for ZANU PF. I have a guarantee in that my housing project is not an overnight project, but a process which required massive indoctrination and orientation of members before giving out those stands. We requested each beneficiary to bring at least five potential voters. We indoctrinate them and because most of them are poor and vulnerable people, they have interests to protect because we will not hesitate to reclaim our stands if there are elements of double standards. All our beneficiaries are now party activists.

As early as January 2011, when other progressive societies were lobbying for the disbanding of the youth service that has masterminded the violence that characterized Zimbabwe since 2000, Musindo was suggesting that the youth militia be reinforced to force individuals into displaying national pride (*Newsday* 18 Jan 2011). He even suggested that the government in 1980 made a mistake of extending the hand of reconciliation to the minority whites since they had remained unrepentant. Whilst attacking other church organizations for perceived links with the MDC, he said DFAN had natural links with ZANU-PF because of its pan-African socialist stance which identifies with the masses. Their slogan has been ‘God + Destiny + ZANU-PF = Economic Prosperity’ (*Southern Times* 6 Nov 2005). Another slogan read: ‘Destiny of Africa Network, A Vote for Your Land; MDC: Anti

funded has given ZANU-PF the opportunity to ignore their pleas for co-existence and tolerance.

Land Movement' (*The Standard* 6 February 2005). Because of his unwavering support and defence of the government's violence and policies, Musindo has officiated at state functions more than any other preacher between 2000 and 2008.

In spite of its strong links and unlimited financial support from ZANU-PF, the church has lost a number of followers. One youth who apparently got frustrated by the gospel that equated mere human figures with spiritual figures in the bible decided to defect to other churches in Harare. Refusing to be identified, the youth lamented that every Sunday they would be subjected to the gospel that depicted ZANU-PF as the savior of the people from both colonialism and bondage. The youth pointed out that even when it was clear that the party had actively participated in destroying the once vibrant economy and perpetrating violence, the church leaders continued to sing praises to the former liberation movement¹². Asked whether they were worried about losing followers, Piki, his spokesman, argued that the Reverend told them to look at the biblical story of Moses in the Book of Exodus, where many Israelites rebelled against Moses and wanted to return to Egypt where they were once slaves¹³. They compare Mugabe to Moses and the people of Zimbabwe to the Israelites. They point to the fact that Moses had faced rebellion by the people he was supposed to deliver, and yet some remained faithful, just like DFAN had remained faithful when others like ZCA were rebelling. Just like the journey from Egypt which was supposed to take a few days ended up taking many years, so has the journey of the people of Zimbabwe taken this long (31 years) to reach their destiny¹⁴.

There are other reasons why Musindo has been supporting the ZANU PF government. Musindo is accused of raping his maid five times and although the matter was referred to the police when the matter happened in 2004. As a result of his political connections, Musindo was only arrested in 2009 after a number of women's organisations had threatened to demonstrate. However, it is not clear whether the case is before the courts of law or was dropped as Musindo is not in prison to this day. As a result of these rape allegations, many believe that the reason why Musindo is supporting ZANU PF is because he has been co-opted thereby keeping him out of prison if

¹² Interview with a former DFAN youth member, Harare, 16 June 2011.

¹³ Piki, interview with author, Harare, 16 June 2011.

¹⁴ Moses Maruza, with author, Harare, 16 June 2011.

found guilty. However, Musindo was allegedly excommunicated in December 2009 from the church he founded by other directors ostensibly for the rape charges. He has however continued to use the name Destiny for Africa network wherever he goes.

Christian Alliance and Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation to 2008

Circumstances leading to the formation of the Christian Alliance meant that its relationship with the government was going to be uneasy. The Zimbabwe Christian Alliance is a joint initiative of various prophetic Christian bodies in Zimbabwe, including the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), Zimbabwe National Pastors Conference (ZNPC,) Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA), Zimbabwe Christian Students Movement (ZCSM), Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), Ecumenical Support Service (ESS), Zimbabwe Orphans through Extended hands (ZOE,) Churches in Harare (CIH), Churches in Bulawayo (CIB), Churches in Plumtree (CIP), Churches in Gweru (CIG), Churches in Victoria Falls (CIV) and Christians Together for Justice and Peace (CJP)¹⁵. It was formed in 2006 as a direct response to Operation Murambatsvina which made several people homeless. As these victims sought shelter in churches, church leaders began asking why the children of God were suffering like this. According to Rev Useni

people began to say maybe we need to deal with the issue of bad governance which is the root cause of this crisis. We begin to see a new theology among the people. They began to question a lot of things they had previously believed in, to look at biblical texts as part of the struggle to actually bring democracy to Zimbabwe in a fresh way (cited in G. Ganiel and J. Tarusarira 2012: 70).

In addition, Bishop Levee Kadenge, the founding convener of the Christian Alliance and member of the Methodist Church claimed that the formal ecumenical organisations representing the mainline and pentecostal

¹⁵ <http://www.thezimbabwean.co/news/4834/zimbabwe-christian-alliance-launched.html>. (Accessed on 27 January 2015.)

denominations were compromised and not responsive enough to the demands of the situation in confronting the national authorities. The mission of the organization is to bring about social transformation in Zimbabwe through prophetic action. The organization works to raise domestic and international awareness of issues affecting Zimbabwe. ZCA focuses on decreasing corruption, raising economic equality and justice, creating efficient social services, and promoting peace and reconciliation. ZCA is not a new initiative but a national network of existing organizations that were engaged in issues of justice and peace. The alliance is an association of like-minded Christian leaders in Zimbabwe who feel called by God to be instrumental in resolving the Zimbabwean crisis through non-violence or peaceful advocacy processes for the benefit of the general populace. Although claiming to be non-violent, the fact that the alliance desired to raise both domestic and international awareness to the issues bedeviling Zimbabwe put it in direct confrontation with the government that refused to accept that there was a 'crisis' in Zimbabwe.

The formation of the ZCA escalated the war of words between the churches in Zimbabwe. In May 2006, the leaders of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) met Mugabe on the eve of the National Day of Prayer and appeared on state television giving support to Mugabe. The president of the ZCC, Peter Nemapare, told a television reporter after the State House meeting: 'We know we have a government that we must support, interact with and draw attention to our concerns. Those of us who have different ideas about this country surely must know we have a government which listens' (*The Sunday Mail* 14 May 2006).

This was roundly condemned by other church members and the Christian Alliance. 'We totally disagree with the tone and substance of the sentiments voiced by the church leaders who went to state house. In what way do they support this government which has shed innocent blood, brutally tortured its citizens and destroyed their homes and livelihoods, and promoted racial hatred?' (*The Independent* 17 May 2006). Bishop Trevor Manhanga, now a staunch supporter of Mugabe and leader of the delegation that met Mugabe for the lunch denied they were supporters of the ruling party. Bishop Manhanga had abandoned the confrontational approach in favour of dialogue and it is not clear what necessitated this change in approach. 'We are prepared to be given all sorts of labels and brick-bats that will be thrown at us, but we will not be diverted from pursuing dialogue' (*The Sunday Mail* 14

May 2006). This disagreement resulted in the cancellation of the National Day of Prayer.

Sensing that other Christian bodies had been co-opted by the state, the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance launched a massive program to pray for Zimbabweans to be united and cease fighting. The Program was called *Save Zimbabwe Campaign*. One of the organizers of the campaign noted that ZCA was formed out of the need to tackle the political, social and economic crisis facing the country. They aimed to do this through dialogue and Church pastor, Reverend Lucky Moyo, one of the organizers of ZCA said about its work, ‘All dialogue will be pursued following Christian principles of non-violence and ethical debate. The war ethos prevailing in Zimbabwe must be broken. We are not going to war; neither do we expect to be attacked. This is simply a platform to engage in meaningful discussion for the greater good of all Zimbabweans’ (*The Standard* 10 September 2006). While the organization didn’t aspire to become a political party, the Mugabe government was alarmed by this development and its press started to publish spurious and misleading reports about the formation of a single political party. In further attempts to silence the leaders of ZCA, Bishop Levee Kadenge, Reverend Ancelom Magaya, Reverend Brian Mugwidi were arrested and interrogated¹⁶. Bishop Kadenge has also received several threats to his life from unidentified people over the phone.

Speaking about the *Save Zimbabwe Campaign*, Reverend Patson Netha, Chairperson of Churches in Bulawayo and one of the founders of ZCA said:

The Christian Alliance is best placed to lead this campaign because we are non-partisan and not interested in contesting or delegating political power. Our only interest is to see that Zimbabweans can worship and praise their maker in freedom, peace and prosperity as God intended them to. We could no longer sit and watch the people suffer and go to other countries to seek better lives. We will, therefore, never tire or give up until the goal is achieved¹⁷.

¹⁶ Ancelom Magaya, interview with author, Harare, 24 February 2011.

¹⁷ Pattison Netha, interview with author, Bulawayo, 24 June 2011.

One interesting thing to note about the ZANU PF government is its changing attitude to prayer meetings. Whilst ZANU PF supported prayer vigils led by organisations it trusted, the coming of the Christian Alliance changed this stance. ZANU PF began to treat prayer as subversive. In 2006, the police banned groups in Zimbabwe including churches from holding prayer meetings and marches to commemorate Operation Murambatsvina as well as highlighting the country's deepening economic crisis. In Bulawayo the police summoned the Christian Alliance and cancelled the scheduled prayer meetings and marches arguing that these were likely to disturb law and order. In March 2007 the police brutally disrupted a prayer meeting organized by the ZCA in the high-density suburb of Highfield in Harare and leaders of the MDC and the civic movement as well as fifty others attending the meeting were arrested and beaten up (Raftopoulos 2009: 227). This incident received worldwide publicity, indicating once again the repressive nature of the Mugabe regime as well as the sense of impunity demonstrated by the state. All these attempts by the government have been to curtail the reconciliation among Zimbabweans.

As early as 2007, Mugabe had already started threatening the bishops and this made their role in promoting peace difficult. Mugabe said the bishops would be treated as political entities since they had decided to take the 'dangerous path' of taking sides with the opposition. While dismissing the pastoral letter issued by the Catholic Bishops on Easter Sunday in 2007 as 'political nonsense', Mugabe said his government would no longer treat the bishops with kid gloves but as political organisations if they continued in their new chosen path of issuing such political statements¹⁸. The result of Mugabe's failure to listen to the church meant that the country went for elections in 2008 with the people deeply divided along political lines. In the same vein, the church didn't have a united voice as some churches had been apparently co-opted by Mugabe especially Reverend Obadiah Musindo of the Destiny for Africa Network, Nolbert Kunonga of the Anglican Church and members of the African Initiated Churches of Johanne Maranke and Masowe. This problem of churches being co-opted by politicians was also noted by the ZCBC, the EFZ and the ZCC in their national vision document where they noted that some Church members had fallen into the pit of political

¹⁸ 'Bishops Threatened by Mugabe', Association of Zimbabwe Journalists, 4 May 2007.

appeasement at the expense of maintaining the integrity of the Church. They noted that divisions within the Church based on differences of political affiliation and/or sympathies were hindering the Church from providing a more coherent and unified voice of leadership to the nation (ZCBC, EFZ & ZCC, 2006: 13).

As a result, attempts by the FBOs to initiate reconstruction and healing after the conflicts of the pre-2008 era can best be described as half-hearted. For the better part of the period prior to 2008 the ruling ZANU-PF party remained suspicious of the activities of religious leaders who were against the adoption of violence as an electoral strategy (Chitando 2005: 230). This forced many of them to remain quiet amidst widespread human rights abuses. It therefore not surprising that the 2008 elections were one of the deadliest in the history of the country as it was marked by violent campaigns characterised by forced removals of opposition supporters from their homes, beatings, rape, maiming and even murder. The 2008 elections left the country with a more difficult task of peace-building and reconstruction of the country.

Swimming against the Tide? ZCA and Attempts at Reconciliation after 2008

The 2008 harmonized elections in Zimbabwe were the deadliest with an estimated 300 opposition supporters losing their lives and thousands being displaced. Whilst the first round of voting was deemed to have met the minimum requirements for free and fair elections, it is the second phase, the Presidential run-off that exposed ordinary Zimbabweans to the fury of ZANU-PF violence. Having lost the first round to Tsvangirai, ZANU-PF launched a reign of terror in the countryside and this culminated in Tsvangirai's withdrawal from elections citing violence against his supporters. In its press statement of 30 April 2008, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) reported on 'country-wide reports of systematic violence in the form of assaults, murders, abductions, intimidation and wanton destruction of property against innocent civilians whose alleged crime is to have voted "wrongly"'¹⁹. It is at this phase of the Zimbabwean crisis that

¹⁹ CCJP, *Grave Concern over post 29 March 2008 political Situation in Zimbabwe*, 30 April 2008.

most FBOs began to lobby even the regional Southern African Development Community (SADC) bloc to mediate in the crisis. Some South African churches visited Zimbabwe and produced a scathing report to Thabo Mbeki, the then mediator in the crisis. The Catholic, Protestant and Evangelical Bishops appealed to the SADC, the African Union and the UN to work towards arresting the deteriorating political and security situation in Zimbabwe. They warned the world that if nothing was done to help the people of Zimbabwe from their predicament, there was a danger of the situation deteriorating to proportions similar to that experienced in Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi and other hot spots in Africa and elsewhere²⁰.

However, the mediation efforts that culminated in the formation of the Unity Government in February 2009 excluded all civil society organizations, including churches. The government leaders formed the Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration in fulfillment of Article VII of the Global Political Agreement (GPA)²¹. However, it should be noted that the crisis in Zimbabwe can be traced back to the role of politicians and as such it is impossible for the same people to go about preaching reconciliation. One informant argued that the three co-chairs of the Organ are all from the Ndebele ethnic group that has suffered most brutality since independence, and as long as there are no perpetrators in the Organ, it will not work to its full potential²². The major question that people are asking is how do victims alone instigate national healing? As a result, the church now remains the only credible institution to reconcile the people as it is in contact with both the grassroots and the political elites.

Church leaders in Zimbabwe believe that healing and reconciliation under the auspices of the inclusive government can only be achieved after the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission, TRC, similar to that set up in South Africa to expose apartheid-era crimes. A 20-strong church delegation comprising representatives from the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference and the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance, ZCA, met

²⁰ <http://www.cafod.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/emergencies/zimbabwe-crisis/bishops-2008-04-23> 'Bishops fear genocide'. (Accessed on 20 May 2011.)

²¹ See Article VII of the GPA

²² Teverai Muguti, interview with author, Harare, 20 June 2011.

Tsvangirai and agreed to support the new government, but requested the establishment of a TRC. ZCA spokesman Raymond Motsi argued that there was a need to resolve the divisions and injustices of the past and this would only be possible if there was full disclosure by perpetrators of human rights violations and other wrongs as well as some form of justice for victims. 'Churches are saying the truth, justice and reconciliation process should start once a new inclusive government is in place. That should mark the beginning of the transitional justice system. This process should not be left to the political parties alone. It should not be elitist and should not be a political decision between ZANU-PF and the MDC'²³. Father Kenneth Makamure of Chishawasha major seminary wrote in the Harare Justice and Peace Commission's newsletter that 'almost all elections in Zimbabwe have been marred by violence and this violence has left people polarized and in need of reconciliation'. He however noted that while efforts are being made by the inclusive government to get people reconciled, it has become apparent that the link between reconciliation and justice has been forgotten or ignored. Father Makamure said 'the first thing is to establish the truth of what actually happened who died, who disappeared, who was maimed, who ordered the deaths and disappearances, who carried out the orders'²⁴. According to many observers, justice demands that structural iniquities which were the cause of injustice and conflict be addressed, such as the rule of law and the use of state agents, including the army and police, to inflict harm on citizens'²⁵. However, ZANU-PF does not subscribe to this kind of justice as they have been responsible for the many atrocities that have affected Zimbabwe.

Academic and human rights activist based at the Union of Westminster in London, Brilliant Mhlanga said there were dangers associated with a national healing process spearheaded by politicians. 'It is very difficult to clearly state who should qualify to spearhead the process of national healing without being understood as being divisive in a state that suffers so much polarity like Zimbabwe. Further the problem arise when the

²³ C, Sithole, 'Zimbabwe: National healing Urged, but many obstacles', Institute for war and peace reporting, 9 Feb 2009.

²⁴ B. Dachs, 'Zimbabwe's church begins election preparations, work on national healing and reconciliation', Catholic News Service. <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1002861.htm>.

²⁵ Ibid.

programme is headed by political figures that are merely bent on fostering cover up of crimes committed so as to put finality to whatever issue is at hand thereby creating a force which has a way of haunting future generations (*The Standard* 6 June 2010). It is within this thinking that the church is seen to be the most objective organ to spearhead healing. However, ZANU-PF has always treated most FBOs with suspicion, especially those that criticize its rule. It believes that these organizations are foreign funded and are bent on effecting an illegal regime change. This has informed the ways in which ZANU-PF has sought to curtail the activities of these FBOs, especially the Christian Alliance and the Catholic Bishops Conference that are deemed to be too radical. This is despite that fact that Mugabe has said that the key to peace was not confined to political leaders, but also in MPs, councilors, chiefs, headmen, family heads, religious and spiritual leaders among others (*The Herald* 25 July 2009).

In a 2011 Pastoral letter, the ZCBC argued that the fact that ZANU-PF had fought to liberate the country shouldn't be taken as though they owned the country. They said:

The liberation of Zimbabwe was achieved through the efforts of those who were inside the country, both armed and unarmed, outside the country and by the international community, The claim to have monopoly in the liberation struggle by any single sector or party is therefore, false and may be the misconception solely responsible for the abuse of human rights and the erosion of the sovereignty of the citizens in Zimbabwe (ZCBC 2011).

However such strong worded letters from the Catholics have often received harsh treatment from the government of Mugabe. The then Minister of Justice, Patrick Chinamasa took a swipe at the church bishops by labeling them front men for the MDC (Muchena 2004: 265). Even Mugabe attacked the church for being obsessed with him. He argued:

I was born in the Roman Catholic, grew up in that church and still celebrate mass there. But look at it in that very church year-in-year-out the bishops are criticising me. Why are they obsessed with me? Even our government is under scrutiny and that's all they focus on. They conveniently ignore all the good we are doing empowering the

people, they don't want to praise that. It's as if our illustrious effort to liberate the country was nothing (*The Zimbabwean* 27 April 2011).

In apparent reference to the ZCBC, Mugabe said that white bishops should be silenced as they always spoke lies about him. He then urged that blacks should form their own churches where they make decisions without being influenced by white-men with old ideologies like that of Ian Smith and the Rhodesians. Mugabe's attack on the clergy came days after police detained a Catholic priest, Fr. Marko Mkandla after he gave a sermon at a memorial service for victims of a government crackdown on dissidents in the 1980s²⁶. Any attempts by the church to bring the people together are met with heavy-handedness from the police.

ZCA and National Healing

The Christian Alliance has been at the receiving end of government brutality for their stance towards the need to have proper national healing and reconciliation. The CA has been housing victims of political violence, providing them with food and shelter after the massive displacements since 2008. In April 2008, 5 members of the CA were taken away for questioning whilst others were assaulted in a raid by riot police at the offices of CA. Rev Useni Sibanda, the National Coordinator for the CA complained that the actions by the police were pure harassment of church organisations which were doing their usual work²⁷.

As recently as February of 2011, the Police raided church premises in Harare's Glen Norah suburb where more than 100 Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T) supporters aligned to Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai sought refuge after fleeing from their homes in Mbare which has been witnessing increasing political violence²⁸. The police reportedly questioned them about the identities of people who had provided them with food,

²⁶ <http://www.churchnewsireland.org/news/world-news/zimbabwean-roman-catholic-bishops-are-among-mugabes-staunchest-critics/>. (Accessed on 18 December 2011.)

²⁷ Reverend Useni Sibanda, interview by author, Harare, 23 December 2011.

²⁸ John Makumbe, interview by author, Harare, 28 December 2011.

blankets and other amenities so that they could intimidate them. The Christian Alliance, an umbrella group for most of the country's Protestant churches, said that police had twice raided a church property in Harare where people accused of being Tsvangirai supporters and driven from their homes had found shelter. At a meeting organized by the Mass Public Opinion Institute, Bishop Ancelom Magaya of the ZCA argued that the church should be left alone to take care of the victims of violence and that the police should stop harassing the church and civic organisations that were housing the victims. He said that the church champions the godly values of peace, justice and tolerance and in applying an Old Testament scripture in the positive sense he stated that an eye for an eye leaves Zimbabwe blind. He made reference to Ezekiel 45 verse 9 which says '...Enough O princes of Israel: remove violence and plunder, and execute justice and righteousness, take away your evictions of my people, says the Lord'²⁹.

In April 2011, the CA in Harare organized a prayer for the country but the riot police launched a vicious attack on the gathering of about 600 people, arresting 14 and injuring dozens. Those arrested were charged with 'causing public violence' and were held for two days. Commenting on the arrests, Simon Loveitt of the United Reform Church which is a member of the CA said:

This brutal attack on people gathered to pray for peace represents a new level of oppression and violence in the long litany of human rights violations by the police. The greatest irony is that people praying for peace were charged with 'causing public violence' while the only violence was from those who are charged with the protection of citizens from the very acts they perpetrated³⁰.

The CA is mainly targeted because it has called for the creation of a commission to hear cases of political violence and determine punishment for perpetrators, and compensation for victims. The CA in its statement said

²⁹ Bishop Ancelom Magaya, 'Élections and National Healing: Which should come before the other?' (Lecture, New Ambassador Hotel, Harare, 24 February 2011).

³⁰ 'Police Attack Church in Zimbabwe', <http://www.persecution.org>. visited 10 June 2011.

there needed to be an independent commission, ‘composed of eminent men and women of integrity from various sectors of society including ministers of religion and former or practicing judges’. The commission would, ‘hear and consider each case on its own merits and decide on appropriate compensation to be paid on wronged ones and or due punishment’³¹. This is what ZANU-PF fears most and they will do all they can to keep the country divided, and they would benefit immensely in the event of elections being held without reconciliation. This is because they control the security apparatuses which they can deploy to coerce people to vote for them. ZANU-PF has also been attacking a lot of churches in the rural areas of Muzarabani and Shamva in Mashonaland Central Province. Most ZANU-PF officials accused such churches in these areas of engaging in politics while hiding behind the pulpit (Chitando 2005: 230). The activities of ZANU-PF are slowing the attempts of the Church organizations to foster unity in the country. There is serious evidence of lack of political will among Zimbabwean politicians especially those from ZANU-PF to support both the Organ on healing and the activities of FBOs. This sharply contrasts with the roles of Tutu and Mandela in South Africa who were instrumental in getting people to accept the TRC’s collective memory and to get on with reconciliation. Tutu’s message of forgiveness set a compelling frame of reference for moving beyond the atrocities uncovered. Mandela’s constant and insistent calls for reconciliation, coupled with his willingness to accept the findings of the TRC (even when the ANC did not), were surely persuasive for many South Africans (Gibson 2006: 418). This is what observers have noticed as the missing link in Zimbabwe’s attempts at reconciliation and reconstruction after the numerous conflicts of the last decade. The lack of support from the politicians, especially ZANU-PF which control the security apparatus has complicated the work of FBOs. Even Mugabe tacitly accepted that as politicians they had failed to do the right thing to stop violence and support the Organ on national healing. At a national day of prayer Mugabe said ‘regrettably, we have not always lived up to our responsibilities as leaders...we need to correct certain wrongs we have taken as a nation from time to time’ (*Herald* 25 July 2009).

However, FBOs like the ZCA have continued to swim against the tide

³¹ ‘Church group urges truth commission on country’s violence’, <http://www.zimbabwemetro.com/news/church-group-urges-truth-commission-on-countrys-violence/>. (Accessed on 10 June 2011.)

and continue to do groundwork among the grassroots to encourage healing of wounds and reconciliation. While the work of FBOs like ZCA has met with resistance from the other partners in the Inclusive Government, members of the MDC have been acknowledging its activities. The Co-Minister of National Healing, Honourable Sekai Holland of MDC-T saluted the ZCA for its contribution to the ongoing national healing programme noting that the organisation was playing a critical role towards positive change in Zimbabwe since the days of the Save Zimbabwe Campaign to the present day. She argued:

Christian Alliance was the first organisation to present the Organ with a position paper on National Healing soon after the names of the Co-Ministers of National Healing had been announced. I have always said it that Zimbabwe can never move forward unless we heal our land. For that reason, I am happy to be sitting here with people who are not really new to me with regards to this noble cause of fighting for peace and justice. Christian Alliance is an organisation that has played a big part in making Zimbabwe what it is today and my sincere hope is that you continue with the good work and that we find ways of working together to synergize our efforts. . For that reason, you would find that the Organ's national healing roadmap borrows a lot from your document³².

Though the CA strongly objects to having the healing and reconciliation program led by politicians, one board member Bishop Magaya noted that they were left with no option but to see to it that the Organ play a key role in bringing healing to the nation, but as Christian Alliance they would be guided by principles of seeking truth, peace and justice hence they have also initiated and participated in national healing programmes across Zimbabwe. They have their own programs throughout the country. They work with the churches as well as the parent ministry. At a recent meeting with the Organ on Healing, the National Director for Christian Alliance Rev Useni Sibanda explained the organisation's involvement in national healing work as well its vision towards a healed Zimbabwe. He argued:

³² Sekai Holland (Minister of National Healing), interview by author, Harare, 20 December 2011.

Our efforts are mainly faith based and we have worked through the church structures to bring healing to Zimbabwe. We believe the church is better positioned to champion national healing given that it preaches the gospel of forgiveness each day. We feel the current environment realistically allows for groundwork towards ultimate healing of Zimbabwe. In that quest, we however feel that we can achieve more by sharing our vision and lobbying the Organ towards meaningful healing of Zimbabwe³³.

The Christian Alliance has got presence in the provinces through churches and ZCA hubs and though they are more focussed on foundational work towards national healing; their aim is to transform communities beyond the four walls of the churches. The ZCA's intervention towards national healing is three pronged and that is, engagement with the Organ for National Healing, engaging with the communities in areas like Masvingo, Mashonaland East, Mashonaland West, Mashonaland Central to deal with conflict at community level and conducting the healing of memories programmes that proffer various options of dealing with trauma. The ZCA has also been trying to draw experiences from the efforts to reconcile people in countries like Rwanda, Uganda and South Africa. The ZCA believes that for the Organ to be successful in reconciling people and building sustainable peace it has to set up an independent Truth, Justice and Peace Commission modelled along the lines of the South Africa process established after the fall of apartheid to facilitate the National Healing process³⁴.

Though seemingly swimming against the tide, the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance's ongoing national healing programme is gaining ground with political violence victims openly speaking out. At a recent community healing meeting at Chikarudzo Primary School in Chief Mugabe's (not related to President Mugabe) area of Masvingo victims of the violence that characterised the 2008 Presidential re-run elections came out to speak openly about their experiences to the ZCA team. The victims chronicled the circumstances surrounding their torture, who tortured them and how they felt after the community healing programme. Four of the victims who survived

³³ Reverend Useni Sibanda, e-mail message to author, 10 January 2012.

³⁴ Interview with Christian Alliance member, 12 December 2011. (The informant requested anonymity).

death by a whisker in the 2008 Presidential election rerun said they were lucky to be alive but were still living in fear because of the continued threats from the perpetrators who to this day have not even been called for questioning by the police. Some of the victims were actually sold off by their relatives. It is such activities that have caused ZANU-PF to attempt to curtail the activities of the ZCA to such an extent that they intimidate them and deny them access to hold meetings.

The ZCA also managed to hold what they call Peace Building workshops at Magunje growth point at the Salvation Army church. The Magunje workshop was attended by 22 church representatives and people openly shared their experiences on how violence took place as well as its effects to date. Another community dialogue meeting was held in Sanyati at Sanyati Baptist Church. This was made possible through the Pastors Fraternal. Pastor Wilson Mugabe, the Senior Projects Officer of the ZCA said the following concerning community meetings;

We have successfully held Community healing and dialogue workshops in Sanyati, Masvingo, Magunje and Gweru. Throughout these meetings, people also spoke on the need to engage the chiefs and kraal heads as these are key to peace building efforts in their community areas. An interface meeting was also held at our Harare offices with the Co-Chair of National Healing Honourable Sekai Holland to explore ways of working together³⁵.

Pastor Mugabe highlighted that the Masvingo experience where victims openly shared their experiences was indicative of the deep seated hurt that existed in Zimbabwe's various communities. A testimony by one victim of such attacks clearly shows that the people in the country desperately need justice, healing and reconciliation. One victim narrated his ordeal thus;

It is really painful to be existing in the same community with someone who battered you and left you for dead all in the name of political activism. To make matters worse, I had not committed any 'political' crime. The only crime that I committed was acceding to

³⁵ Notes taken at a community dialogue meeting in Sanyati organized by the Christian Alliance, 8 June 2011. Political Violence Victims speaks out.

pray at an MDC rally but as a Christian leader I had taken that to be part of my ministry. I can pray for anyone at any place regardless of whatever political affiliations they may have. We reported the matter to the police but up to this day no one has been arrested. They have the names of the perpetrators who are freely roaming the streets. The perpetrators are even threatening to cut off our heads this time around so that they make sure we are really dead³⁶.

The activities by ZCA also show that there are deep rooted conflicts among family members as one victim revealed that he was betrayed by his elder brother's son to the ZANU-PF youth militias. He said:

My elder brother's son gave my name to the militias. They came for me and started beating me all over and accusing me of being an enemy of the party. They removed my shoes and started beating my soles. I am still having problems with my left leg and sometimes my whole body aches. In spite of all this, the perpetrators have not apologised but are continuing with the threats since they have not been brought to book. We however continue to pray for them hoping God will touch their hearts³⁷.

One board member of the ZCA, John Makumbe stated that efforts to bring about healing have not always yielded the intended results. He said that at first the ZCA would gather the victims and perpetrators together for camping where they would be encouraged to speak out their experiences. However, such camping has resulted in new instances of violence among the youths due to the polarisation that is rife in the country. However, such conflicts have also exploded at high levels like in 2009 when the Organ had invited political parties for a healing meeting. As a result, the ZCA has changed its tactics by simply initiating projects in communities that had much violence and encouraging victims and perpetrators to work together. The result was that people tended to 'warm' towards each other, and the ZCA believes that this is one of the best models for reconciliation. Other activities

³⁶ Interview with a political victim at a Christian Alliance meeting in Masvingo, 10 June 2011

³⁷ Interview with a victim of violence, Masvingo, 10 June 2011.

include playing soccer together and just inviting the former belligerents for a meal and drink together. Such activities have tended to ease tensions among the villagers and to the ZCA, this is the first step towards bring people together. Makumbe noted that whilst it is difficult to bring healing per se, efforts should be directed at issues of justice and truth, since healing is a by-product of the two. According to Maxwell (2005: 193) while religion has helped Zimbabweans to find some sense of meaning in their experience of violence, and some means to heal its traumas through acts of confession, reconciliation and restitution; it still has its own challenges. Thus according to the ZCA, the National Healing Programme and the Organ are bound to fail as they are not focusing on justice and truth. Sekai Holland, the co-minister of the Organ noted that their failure should not be attributed to inefficiency on the part of the Organ, but to the fact that the Organ was not given full authority to operate³⁸. In fact many believe that the Organ is unlawful as its terms of reference are not enshrined in the constitution and that it has no legal powers to summon and prosecute people. As it is, it is just a smokescreen to hoodwink SADC, AU and the UN into believing that the leaders in Zimbabwe are working towards reconciliation and healing.

Conclusion

The conflict that engulfed Zimbabwe since the beginning of the last decade has left the country polarised along religious and denominational lines, racial and tribal lines. The crisis in itself is a serious indictment on the policy of reconciliation that was espoused by Mugabe and ZANU-PF first towards the minority whites and later among the blacks following the disturbances in Matabeleland. By 2008, Zimbabwe reached the zenith of intolerance as militias affiliated to the political parties, especially the then ruling ZANU-PF terrorised civilians resulting in not only displacement but physical harm and death. As a result of regional intervention by SADC to bring peace back to Zimbabwe, a Government of National Unity was formed in February 2008 to arrest the collapse of the economy and bring cessation to the hostilities between political parties and ordinary civilians. The Principals in the Unity

³⁸ Sekai Holland, 'Elections and National Healing: Which should come before the other?', (Lecture, New Ambassador Hotel, Hotel, 24 February 2011).

Government formed an Organ responsible for National Healing and Reconciliation to advise on the way to build sustainable peace in Zimbabwe. However, nothing has been done by this Organ as it is dominated by the same people who are responsible for the chaos that has characterised Zimbabwean politics since 2000.

The great mistrust of the politicians by the ordinary people has opened avenues for the role of FBOs to conduct outreach programmes to encourage tolerance and cohesion among Zimbabweans. Though doing a responsible job, the activities of the FBOs especially the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance have not always been complemented by the government, especially ZANU-PF. The major reason for sabotaging the work of the FBOs to inculcate values of peace after such a long period of conflict is due to the fact that ZANU-PF's political fortunes rests primarily on maintaining a divided society that is always at war. Furthermore, the insistence of the FBOs to have a proper national healing premised on truth, reconciliation and total disclosure of the crimes and justice has not always gained currency among ZANU-PF as they are obviously responsible for the majority of the violence of the era. In such a scenario, ZANU-PF advocates for a blanket amnesty where no attempts are made to bring the victims and perpetrators to reconcile. The FBOs argue that ZANU-PF's formula does not lead to sustainable peace as people are still hurting which may tempt the victims to seek revenge. They also believe that a blanket amnesty sends a wrong message to the perpetrators of violence, that they can beat and kill people with impunity. As a result of this disagreement, ZANU-PF has sought to curtail the activities of the FBOs by either refusing to clear them to meet the grassroots and talk about their experiences or physically assaulting the pastors and the people who participate in their meetings. It is in this vein that the FBOs are literally swimming against the tide in so far as they try to build sustainable peace in Zimbabwe is concerned. As a result, the reconstruction of Zimbabwe has not moved since 2008 as the politicians are merely concerned with safeguarding their political power and their foot-soldiers who terrorised people. However, this paper has shown that in spite of the massive restrictions placed in their paths by the politicians, FBOs like ZCA have worked tirelessly with both the grassroots and some within the unity government to preach reconciliation and encourage Zimbabweans to engage in peace-building process. It remains too soon to judge if Zimbabweans are getting the message as the politicians keep undoing the activities of the FBOs.

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