

ZIMBABWE PEACE PROJECT

REPORT ON ORGANISED MDC STAY AWAY : 2 - 6 JUNE 2003.

OVERVIEW

The MDC, the main opposition political party in Zimbabwe, organised a mass demonstration during the week of 2 – 6 June 2003. The demonstration dubbed “ the Final Push” was aimed at the government so that the two parties would sit and try and solve the economic and political problems facing the country. . It is also said the aim of the weeklong demonstration was to try and force the current President Mugabe to resign. Some papers have pointed out that the MDC is convinced that once Mugabe is out of power, way of resolving problems will be found.

Like has become the norm, the call for people not to go to work that week was received with both hands especially by urban people who are the ones mostly affected by the harsh economic conditions. Today most workers can no longer afford to go to work the whole month due to high transport costs and worse still the majority of families can now only afford one meal a day. To some workers the call was a blessing in disguise in that although Zimbabweans were yelling that the President has overstayed, some were happy that for that whole week they were able to save on transport and any other expenses incurred whilst at work.

As the demonstration day approached, the government went out in full force promising that it was going to ruthlessly crash the MDC marches. Other sources were hinting that the army had been asked to use live ammunition where possible.

PROVINCIAL REPORTS

We will now give you reports from the different provinces highlighting only key observations made and more will follow in our usual detailed report.

HARARE/CHITUNGWIZA

- On Monday morning all roads leading to the city centre had road blocks manned by members of the military police, police and CIO who were searching vehicles, presumably for weapons and materials to do with the marches.

- In areas like Epworth, Chitungwiza, Glen View, and Budiriro police and army officers were alleged to have been actually barring people from going to work because they suspected that they would end up in the city centre and demonstrate as planned by the MDC.
- Three days before the marches, some patrons of a number of night clubs and bottle stores were assaulted or publicly humiliated for no apparent reasons, as they were accused of supporting the stay away. Joint army and police raids were made at Pensao night club (City centre) Babylon Night club (Warren Park 1), Rufaro Bar (Kuwadzana 4) Munyuki (Epworth) and Makoni Night Club (Chitungwiza).
- In the majority of High Density suburbs where political intolerance is rife, people were assaulted and harassed for wearing anything red, a colour associated with the MDC and people were said to be promoting the activities of the opposition party.
- The riot police even on innocent members of the public used tear gas indiscriminately. For example, the police at Warren Park 1 shopping centre fired tear gas on people who were grouped and waiting for the arrival of the Daily News delivery van.
- During the last two days of the weeklong stay-away the city was teeming with youth who had been ferried from rural areas. Their conduct showed that they had instructions to deal violently with supporters of the MDC and members of the public seen reading Daily Newspaper. The youths were easily identifiable because they were generally unkempt, poorly dressed and moved in large groups. On Friday they were dressed in T/Shirts marked “ No to Mass Action.” The youths were apparently accommodated at the Zanu PF Headquarters where you could see items of laundry hanging on the fence and walls surrounding the complex.

BULAWAYO

- Most of the businesses in Bulawayo were closed, with banks, fast foods outlets, shops, firms and schools closing doors to their workers and public.
- A human rights activist in the Pumula/Luveve Constituency was assaulted, harassed and intimidated by army details. He fled from his home and is still putting up at different homes belonging to friends, relatives and well wishers because the situation remains tense.
- Some members of the public in the same constituency were beaten up by a gang of youths believed to be from Venture Camp who were accusing people of belonging to the opposition MDC.

- Two policemen accompanied by some Zanu PF supporters harassed the Councillor for ward 24 Bulawayo South. The Councillor was arrested the following day for attending a peace and justice prayer meeting at the Catholic Cathedral.
- Nketa Clinic had to be temporarily closed after police, and army personnel went and assaulted people there.
- The Manager of a supermarket was assaulted by police and army details and forced to open the shop.
- A gang comprising of war veterans and green bombers threatened several people.
- Army and riot police personnel assaulted people at Glengary Shopping Centre and left six people wounded.
- A group of MDC supporters who had gathered for the planned demonstration were violently dispersed. Some were arrested and taken to the Central Police station, Ross Camp and Stops Camp for detention.
- ZRP officers went on rampage beating up vendors at Renkini bus terminus, who were selling maize meal on the black market.

MANICALAND

State Security agents (army, police, and CIO) were deployed into the streets of Mutare three days before the start of the stay-away.

- A Councillor for Ward 4 and his colleagues were picked up from their respective homes and allegedly bundled into the boot of a Mazda 323 by army officers who took them to Marange, some 150 km from Mutare. In Marange, they were assaulted and forced to reveal the MDC's plans for the stay-away, and to name the provincial organisers. From there, they were brought back to Mutare and detained at the Central Police Station where they were allegedly tortured for four days. Other activists went underground.
- MDC supporters in Sakubva gathered as early as 0600 hours and were on the streets by 0700 hours ready for their march. The march was however, quickly and ruthlessly crushed by the police and army and about 30 people were arrested. In Dangamvura people remained in the homes.
- Daily News vendors were assaulted and had their papers destroyed.

- About 3000 MDC youths marching from Chikanga were confronted by a menacing group of soldiers. The group resultantly scattered and ran away for dear life. It was later discovered that there were CIO operatives among the group who kept updating their authorities on the group's progress. As many as 2000 were arrested.
- The city was quiet, with more security personnel than civilians. Only a few businesses were open.
- On the night of the first day of the stay away, several opposition leaders were picked up from their homes and detained. The MDC's provincial Chairperson , Timothy Mubhawu was allegedly forced to swim in a sewerage pond. Other activists were also humiliated in a similar fashion.
- Managers of shops and banks that had not opened were followed at their homes and forcibly taken to open their institutions.
- Live shots were allegedly fired in Sakubva when a group of MDC supporters who tried to regroup.
- Arrested people were released after paying \$10 000 bail and will appear in court on 17 June 2003.

MASVINGO

- On the eve of the stay-away, houses of several MDC supporters were stoned by a group of Zanu PF youths who were ferried around in a truck.
- On the same day, two brothers were kidnapped and taken to the outskirts of Masvingo where they were severely assaulted by a group of Zanu PF youths and CIO operatives.
- A Mrs Mwatenga was arrested the following day and detained at a police station where she was allegedly assaulted all over her body including her private parts. It is alleged that CID and CIO operatives as well as war veterans took turns to assault her. Up to now she still cannot walk.
- On the same day heavily armed soldiers with whom they had running battles confronted MDC supporters who had gathered in town to march to the government building. This forced shops and banks to close. Many MDC supporters and ordinary members of the public were arrested and detained. Among those arrested was the Executive Mayor of the city, the constituency MP and several opposition leaders.

- The police/army moved around Mucheke forcing beer outlets to close. That night bottle stores and night clubs were raided by the security agents, and patrons and workers were assaulted. People moving around the streets were not spared.
- Managers of shops and banks were visited by security agents and forced to open their businesses and hence on 4, 5 and 6 June 2003 all shops and banks were open but with little business.
- Soldiers and the police, all of whom were heavily armed, were deployed at growth points and other rural centres. Hence many people were assaulted at Nyika Growth point, Gokomere, and Vhuku business Centre either by soldiers or by Zanu PF youths.

MIDLANDS

- Running battles between the police/army and members of the MDC were reported on 31 May 2003. The security agents allegedly fired live ammunition into the air but this failed to deter the crowd of almost 15000 MDC supporters. Live bullets were subsequently shot into the crowd and it is believed one man was shot and later died. As many as 20 teargas canisters were also allegedly fired into the crowd.
- After the incident, top MDC officials were picked up from their homes during the evening. Beer halls and Night clubs were forcibly closed by soldiers and the police.
- From 1 June army and police officers were deployed to all street corners in the city and suburbs. On the next day business ground to a halt as shops, banks and even vendors closed shop. In the evening the police and army continued raiding beer outlets.
- On 3 June the police started forcing businesses to open or face the wrath of the law. However, the town was tense as police and army personnel were seen moving around in pumas, personnel carriers and defenders, armed to the teeth.
- Shop owners who had not heeded the call to open were harassed and humiliated publicly by, for example, being ordered to roll in dirt, walk on their clenched fists and to pick up rubbish using their mouths.
- The same treatment was meted out to innocent members of the public at the Kudzanai Bus Terminus. Lone ladies were especially targets for such rough treatment.

MASHONALAND CENTRAL

- Four days before the stay away the Zanu PF Provincial youth leader, Dick Mafios, summoned business operators to a meeting where he allegedly threatened to mete instant justice to any of them who would close their businesses.
- On 30 May 2003 youths ferried by buses from such outlying areas as Shamva, Rushinga and Mt Darwin bolstered by members of the local women's league, moved around Bindura threatening anyone who heeded the MDC stay away with dire consequences.
- On 1 June, 5 Zupco buses brought in another group of Zanu PF youths from Harare.
- On 2 June a security guard who is alleged to have incited his colleagues to join the stay away was sold out by one of his work mates. He was picked up by the police and detained. In the cells he is alleged to have been assaulted and humiliated, including being forced to eat his stool. A sympathetic police officer is said to have anonymously informed the ZCTU who engaged a lawyer and came to the man's rescue.
- On 5 June the MDC provincial Chairperson, Tapera Macheke, was abducted from his home and taken along Shamva road where he was severely assaulted with all sorts of weapons before being taken to the Zanu PF offices where he was again assaulted until he lost his consciousness. He was then taken by the police to Bindura hospital and was transferred to Harare. .
- At a road block in Shamva the police were forcing those without IDs to fight each other. Youths with T/shirts marked "No to Mass Actions" were causing mayhem in the mining town up to now.

MASHONALAND EAST

- Since the MDC had signalled that demonstrators would assemble in all major cities and towns all roads leading into Marondera the provincial capital had roadblocks manned by the army and police.
- On Monday the first day of the demonstration, it is alleged that the governor (Mr Karimanzira) and Minister of Defence (Dr S Sekeramayi) held a meeting at the Governor's office with Zanu PF youths ferried from areas around Marondera town. It is alleged the youths were ordered to 'discipline' all suspected MDC members and those participating in the stay away. Their other task was to monitor all shops and businesses and report all those closed to the police and army.

- After the meeting the youths marched into town and assaulted all Daily News paper vendors. They also snatched all the copies of the newspaper and destroyed them.
- It is alleged that around mid day Zanu PF youths stoned houses of known and suspected MDC members. A total of eight houses were stoned; three houses in Cherutombo, one in Dombotombo, one in Nyameni, one in Yellow City and two houses in Rujeko. Windows and roofs were destroyed although no one was injured.
- On Tuesday 3 June about 17 Zanu PF youths led by war veteran Wilfred Marimo besieged Wenimbi Primary School looking for the school head suspected to be an MDC member. When they could not locate the school head, 6 teachers were abducted and taken to Waverley farm where they were interrogated, harassed and assaulted for supporting MDC.
- Most shops and banks remained open in Marondera since Zanu PF youths were monitoring them.
- During the crackdown on all suspected MDC supporters, the Zanu PF youths are alleged to have descended on one of our monitors' house in Marondera town. They are said to have searched the house and took away \$12000.00 and a list of people who attended voter education workshop.
- Suspected MDC members were abducted and taken to Zanu PF offices where they were assaulted, harassed and later released.
- On Thursday and Friday (5-6 June) some members of the public were taken to a Zanu PF base at Zanu PF Headquarters where they were assaulted. Also long distance travellers had their goods like maize and sugar confiscated and some unfortunate owners were taken for a beating at the base.
- On June 7, 2003, ten Zanu PF youths raided Chitanda Supermarket and took sugar. They blamed the owner of overcharging but the owner managed to lock them in and called the police. The 2kg sugar, which was sold for \$1000 each, was reduced to \$800.00 but the youths did not have any money. The police arrested the youths for not paying for the sugar but were soon released.
- It is alleged that the youths who caused havoc in Marondera were seen being paid for the 'services' they had rendered to Zanu PF during the week long MDC organised stay away.

MATEBELELAND NORTH

- The province normally witnesses an influx of security agents whenever the opposition MDC calls for demonstrations, stay away or even meetings. This is because the government now sees the area as an MDC strong hold.
- People in Matebeleland have always blamed the Zanu PF government of neglecting them and since 1980 have always voted for the opposition.
- The weeklong MDC stay away saw a total number of forty-four (44) people being arrested. The aim of the arrests was only to frustrate known and suspected MDC members. Of the arrested six were women and one student.
- In Hwange, Lupane, Bubi and Victoria Falls the police and the army were on 24 hours patrol and they raided She-Beens and assaulted patrons.
- Houses of suspected MDC members were also raided by the police and Zanu PF youths looking for any materials, linked to MDC.
- An illegal curfew was declared in the province during which Zanu PF youths randomly assaulted people moving around after 2000 hours.
- One family lost a Television set and a decoder to Zanu PF youths who blamed them of listening to evils from the west via satellite.
- One suspected MDC supporter was forced to flee Victoria Falls and sought refuge in Hwange after being abducted and tortured by Zanu PF supporters.
- Kamativi has become a no go area for non Zanu PF supporters. The place is virtually being controlled by the Zanu PF youths being trained and stationed there.
- Not all shops opened during the five-day of the stay away although the police and the army were forcing them to remain open for business.