

## Zimbabwe lobbies to rejoin Commonwealth

The East African by Kitsepile Nyathi

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Zimbabwe President Emmerson Mnangagwa. FILE PHOTO | AFP

Zimbabwe at the ongoing Commonwealth summit in Rwanda continued with lobbying for readmission 18 years after it was thrown out of the body over allegations of human rights abuses.

President Emmerson Mnangagwa's government submitted an application on May 15, 2018 to re-join the grouping of 54 countries, a year after the ouster of strongman Robert Mugabe in a military coup.

The late Mugabe, who ruled Zimbabwe between 1980 and 2017 with an iron fist, was at the loggerheads with the Commonwealth over alleged human rights abuses and electoral fraud.

Zimbabwe's ambassador to Rwanda Charity Manyeruke, who is attending the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (Chogm) in Kigali as an observer alongside other top government officials, told local media that the southern African country's participation at the summit was a "positive development."

"Zimbabwe is excited to be participating in Commonwealth forums as this presents opportunities to network with the international community taking into account the government of Zimbabwe's policy of engagement and reengagement," Ms Manyeruke said.

"The Commonwealth meeting in Kigali has provided opportunities for our Zimbabwean diaspora across the globe, who are participating as panellists, facilitators and as delegates in the forums.

"I have met with the Zimbabwe diaspora, media, private sector, academia, civil society, those in finance and banking, arts and students, they have had an opportunity to engage."

Three Zimbabwean ministers have been attending side events at the summit such as the Commonwealth Women Forum and the Commonwealth Business Forum.

The Zimbabwean mission in Rwanda is also holding an exhibition to showcase products from the southern African country.

Harare has been lobbying countries such as Rwanda to support its efforts to be readmitted into the Commonwealth.

Zimbabwe's Foreign Affairs deputy minister David Musabayana said he had held meetings with influential people to discuss the country's potential readmission.

"We are humbled to be invited to attend as observers," Mr Musabayana said.

"There is a lot of interest in Zimbabwe from Commonwealth member countries, who are keen to do business and invest in Zimbabwe," he added.

After the coup, countries such as the United Kingdom appeared ready to support Zimbabwe's return to the Commonwealth, but the stance has since changed owing to President Mnangagwa's reluctance to implement promised electoral reforms.

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