

Exposing Mnangagwa Sadc facade

Bulawayo24 by Luke Tamborinyoka

7 Aug 2024



President Emmerson Mnangagwa

Your Excellencies, I write this public letter as an ordinary citizen of Zimbabwe, a member state of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

It is in the true African spirit of ubuntu that we, the ordinary citizens of this land, welcome you to our beloved land of Zimbabwe when you jet in for the 44th ordinary SADC summit next week.

When you get into Zimbabwe, Your Excellencies, you will notice a new ambience, with newly paved roads and a litany of palm trees and boulevards leading you into the heart of Harare and to your specially-constructed places of royal ensconcement.

We know you and your respective delegations will be accommodated in plush hotels and in new Swiss villas specifically built for you for use during your three-day stay in Harare.

We now know for instance that you will enjoy uninterrupted power supply because in a special memo now in the public domain, the government has purposely directed the national power utility, ZESA, to make sure that you are cushioned from the daily tenuous inconvenience that we, the ordinary Zimbabwean citizens of this land, endure every day.

All vendors and roadside traders who usually line up our bustling streets to eke out an honest living have all been driven out of the city as the government felt they were just but horrid filth not deserving of your venerated sight.

Our three national referral hospitals have no critical equipment while doctors and other health staff, just like the rest of our civil service, are grossly underpaid and demoralised. Ordinary Zimbabweans are dying every day as our hospitals have become death chambers.

However, we, the ordinary citizens, have learnt that there has recently been hectic work on emergency renovations at Parirenyatwa hospital in the capital to create a special VIP ward particularly for you and your fellow SADC delegates.

The motive is to ensure that you are cushioned from the parlous medical services that we, the citizens, receive every day in our public health facilities.

You will recall, Your Excellencies, that our Zimbabwean leaders have since shunned these local medical facilities. Remember our former President Robert Mugabe died in a foreign land in far-flung Singapore while receiving treatment at a medical infirmary in that country.

Yes, the "patriotic" Robert Mugabe died while unpatriotically receiving treatment outside his own country.

Even the rest of them, particularly our own current Vice President, Constantino Nyikadzino Guvheya Chiwenga, who last week opened the SADC Industrialisation Week on behalf of his boss, are frequent visitors to China for medical treatment.

Your Excellencies, with your special medical ward specifically designated for you at Parirenyatwa hospital, you will be adequately cushioned from the daily medical experiences of the ordinary citizens of this country.

Roads have been constructed, surfaced and resurfaced; villas have been constructed specifically for you while vendors, touts and public transport operators have all been shunted out of the city to create good, serene optics just for you.

Our government believes the teeming vendors and informal traders, who earn an honest living in our capital city, are an unsavoury grime that you, our esteemed leaders, must not see lest you lose your appetite and spend the whole week retching, much to the embarrassment of the host government.

While our public health, education and all public infrastructure have all but collapsed, our prudent government has seen it fit to spend just about US\$240 million to spruce up and beautify Harare just for your esteemed, royal eyes.

By our Zimbabwean standards, this has been an expensive ruse to put up appearances and to impress you, our esteemed visitors, while we, the ordinary citizens, scrounge to eke a living, with whole families now surviving on less than US \$1 a day.

1. A siege on the citizens

Your Excellencies, I know you receive comprehensive reports from your local ambassadors stationed here. In the run-up to this Summit, we have seen a virtual closure of democratic space and a needless clamping down on opposition leaders, civic society activists and human rights defenders.

It all started with the arrest and needless detention of opposition leader Jameson Timba and 78 others, including a one-year old child, for the cardinal sin that they had dared to assemble to commemorate Youth Day on June 16, 2024. .

Timba's crime is that he allowed the youths to assemble at his private residence, where they chose to meet privately and not disrupt public peace and public order.

As I write, over 110 activists have been rounded up, some from their homes, while others have been abducted from a plane and brutally tortured.

Your Excellencies, since 2022 until last year's elections, there was a notable increase in cases of violence and murder across the country.

Yet you, our esteemed SADC leaders, maintained the silence of the grave as we suffered under the ignominious brutality of your host at next week's summit.

On June 30 this year, as the regime increased its crackdown ahead of this forthcoming summit, armed police in the Midlands town of Kwekwe disrupted the tombstone unveiling ceremony of Mboneni Ncube.

Mboneni was brutally murdered by thugs from Zanu-PF, the party led by His Excellency the incoming SADC chair, on 27 February 2022 ahead of a rally by the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) in Mbizo.

Sixteen people were arrested but immediately released. To date, no one has suffered the consequences of that gruesome murder as the case has become a cold case.

Speaking some eight weeks ago after the disruption of his son's tombstone unveiling ceremony in Kwekwe, Mboneni's father, Kephass, said he and his family were traumatised because the government was not allowing them to live in peace, even after the callous murder of Mboneni, for which no one has been held to account to this day.

There have been other murders that include the callous murder of a clergyman, Bishop Tapfumaneyi Masaya, who was brutally killed in November last year by suspected State-security agents ahead of a contrived by-election in Mabvuku, Harare.

The by-elections happened because your host, through a surrogate and with the collusion of the Speaker of Parliament and the Judiciary, recalled opposition MPs that had just been elected by the citizens.

It has now emerged that Bishop Masaya was murdered as the government pulled all the stops to ensure Mr Scott Sakupwanya got a Parliamentary seat.

Sakupwanya had lost in the previous round but his company had been involved in supplying the voting material in an election in which he was a candidate. He had to get his reward. He had to get his seat at all costs and a clergyman had to die to make sure it happened.

The regime in Harare is obviously afraid of citizen power because they know they stole the ordinary citizens' vote in the last election.

The citizens themselves initially expected robust action from you, our esteemed SADC leaders, after your own observer mission report, which you duly noted and adopted at Heads of State level, noted serious inadequacies in Zimbabwe's last election.

But the signs so far have not been encouraging as you have not acted in any way on your own observer mission's report.

To be honest, Zimbabwean citizens, have lost faith in SADC.

Now your Summit has increased their suffering as the regime comes down hard on them for fear that they may crowd the streets and urge you to heed your own observer mission report that said the plebiscite in Zimbabwe was a farce.

We, the brutalised citizens from whom the vote was stolen, have noted with alarm that you want to bestow upon Mr Emmerson Mnangagwa the esteemed SADC chairmanship

We, the citizens of this country, have simply lost faith in you for what we presume to be your betrayal of the cardinal values as enshrined in the SADC Treaty.

On top of that, your coming to our country has made the citizens unsafe.

Now we, the citizens, are apoplectic and want your Summit over and done with as soon as possible so that the regime can let us live and suffer in peace.

2. An illegitimate President

Your Excellencies, in its final report on the elections in Zimbabwe, the SADC Election Observer Mission crucially concluded that some aspects of the harmonised elections "fell short of the requirements of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, the Electoral Act and the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (2021)."

Given this conclusion by your own SEOM, it is therefore trite, Your Excellencies, to mention that this was an important observation as it simply means that Mr Mnangagwa was not legitimately elected as President of Zimbabwe.

As restated by the SEOM in its final report, electoral democracy within SADC is anchored on Article 4 of the SADC Treaty, which provides for the respect of the fundamental principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

The cited Article 4 emphasizes the upholding of fundamental freedoms and the full participation of the citizens as prerequisites for prudent electoral democracy.

Yet those fundamental freedoms, particularly the right for citizen participation, were viciously assaulted by your hosts in the last election, which election was largely and curiously presided over not by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, as should have been the case, but by a shadowy grouping called Forever Associates of Zimbabwe (FAZ).

FAZ is linked to the country's spy agency and was reportedly run and managed during the last elections by the deputy director of the Central Intelligence Organisation, one Asher Walter Tapfumaneyi.

Most of the citizens were denied the important right of participation as they failed to exercise their right to vote after ZEC deliberately delayed deploying voting ballots to Harare and other opposition

stronghold areas in the major towns and cities.

A 68-year old Mr Mushove collapsed and died while in a voting queue in Harare's Warren Park suburb after the opening of polling was delayed for nine hours due to the absence of ballots.

The SEOM final report on the Zimbabwe elections stated that in the SADC context, a credible election is shorthand for compliance with at least 26 evidence-based criteria for the conduct and management of elections.

However, some of these 26 canons were not complied with in the August 2023 elections in Zimbabwe.

The SEOM duly noted legitimate stakeholder complaints around the composition and independence of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission where about four Commissioners are directly related to senior Zanu-PF and government officials.

The SEOM also noted that the voters' roll was not given to stakeholders in time and was not in a searchable and analyzable format as exhorted by the law.

In sections 6 and 7 of their report, the SEOM also duly noted stakeholder complaints to do with voter intimidation, postal voting, the unsettled matter of the Diaspora vote, State media bias as well as the repression of the basic freedoms of expression, assembly and movement.

The report also critically noted that stakeholders had issues with the secrecy around the procurement and printing of ballot material.

Your Excellencies, you may now know that the ZEC skeletons around their mismanagement of the August 2023 elections have since tumbled out.

It has since emerged that despite being a candidate in the last election; Mr Mnangagwa's office chose the company that supplied the voting material and paid an invoice pertaining to the transmission of the votes, in the process usurping the powers of a supposedly independent Commission.

Not only that, Better Brands, a company belonging to Mr Scott Sakupwany, a Zanu-PF parliamentary candidate in the same election, was the local partner of the South African company that supplied the voting material for the August 2023 election.

The ZEC chairperson, Justice Priscilla Makanyara Chigumba, reportedly received kickbacks for her involvement in the ZEC elections fiasco where it has emerged that the voting material tender was floated well after she had already surreptitiously awarded the contract to a company of Mr Mnangagwa's choice.

Yet again, Your Excellencies, everything points to the fact that the 2023 election in Zimbabwe was a farce and that Mr Mnangagwa, to whom you want to bestow the SADC chairmanship at this Summit in Harare, is not a legitimately elected President of Zimbabwe.

He is an electoral thief.

3. Installing a thief as a village head

If SADC were a village, the SADC chairperson would be the village head, whose role would include ensuring that SADC member States strictly adhere to the sacred dictates of the SADC Treaty.

As you are aware, Your Excellencies, in our traditional African villages, the village head is an important position that demands high probity and elevated integrity.

Similarly, if SADC were a village, the same probity is expected of the Head of State who assumes the position of SADC chairperson.

Never mind your culture of rotation; considering that Mr Mnangagwa claimed the Presidency through a dubious electoral process as noted by your own observer mission, it would set a bad precedent to install such an electoral thief as the SADC village head.

How will Mr Mnangagwa, as SADC chair, ensure that the region sticks to the lofty standards espoused in the sub-regional charter? How would he help ensure that the region holds democratic elections when his own Presidency is a product of gross electoral thievery?

Regrettably, Your Excellencies, bestowing the SADC chairmanship on Mr Mnangagwa, whose election was condemned by almost all credible observer missions, including your own, would be akin to elevating a pickpocket to take stewardship of the sacred vault of regional values.

The values would not be in safe hands!

Dear esteemed SADC leaders, by bestowing the SADC chairmanship on Mr Mnangagwa, you would have committed a heinous transgression, something akin to deploying a convicted and unrepentant rapist to serve as a principal at a convent of Catholic nuns!

Conclusion

Lastly, Your Excellencies, you have an onerous responsibility at this summit to restore the SADC brand to an institution that is respected not only by SADC citizens but by other African countries outside our region and the broader international community.

Regrettably, as ordinary citizens, we may not be able to control or influence your exclusive inter-governmental organisation, especially those of us in Zimbabwe who happen to be saddled with an illegitimate government, a matter which you, as SADC, have not resolved.

Yet, the onus behoves upon you to ensure that the image and brand of SADC is above reproach, which unfortunately will not happen if you allow the sub-regional body to be chaired by a confirmed electoral charlatan.

You have a grand opportunity at this Summit to prove that SADC represents the solidarity of SADC citizens, not the solidarity of SADC leaders.

You have the onus at this Summit to send a loud message in the region that SADC is not a trade union of African Presidents, as we have all come to believe.

By conferring the SADC chairmanship to Mr Mnangagwa, you are likely to lose the opportunity at this Summit to send a sonorous message that SADC is about values and not personalities.

Lastly, Your Excellencies, in this month of heroes that you are flying into our country, may you please find time to sample Zimbabwe's rich and esoteric art and craft products.

In terms of music, I specifically recommend a freshly minted album launched four days ago by Alick Macheso, one of the country's biggest musicians.

The album, titled Kupa Kuturika (Giving begets Receiving) has one particular song called Pane Zvinoda Hama, which literally means we do not live in isolation and that those in our immediate family have a role to play in our lives.

We had thought SADC was family and the issue of the August 2023 stolen election would seize the hearts and minds of our relatives (hama) within our SADC family.

But it appears we are on our own. Macheso may as well recast his lyrics as you, our SADC family, have betrayed our African values by ditching us in this crucial jour. We have now learnt that our family and close relatives in SADC have folded their arms when the moment frantically demanded them to show their hand.

Meanwhile, may you enjoy the lavish accommodation and grand expensive optics specifically created for you.

However, rest assured that we, the ordinary citizens of Zimbabwe, have been deliberately shut out of the plush life and the grand opulence that you have been accorded at our huge expense just for the 72 hours that you will be in Zimbabwe.

Your Excellencies, as you jet in to live the cosh life while deliberately insulated from our daily suffering, kindly remember the citizens of this country that are being battered, arrested and tortured far away from your glazing eyes and those of your ambassadors stationed in Harare.

Spare some thought for the human rights defenders, the opposition leaders, members and the innocent citizens, including a one-year old, who have all been imprisoned and tortured in the interest of subjective and self-serving peace during your three-day stay in Zimbabwe.

Kindly accept, Your Excellencies, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Yours sincerely

Luke Batsirai Tamborinyoka

Luke Tamborinyoka was the Deputy Secretary for Presidential Affairs in the MDC Alliance led by Nelson Chamisa. He is a multiple award-winning journalist and an ardent political scientist.

https://bulawayo24.com/index-id-opinion-sc-columnist-byo-244421.html#google_vignette

Further reading:

<https://muckrack.com/luke-tamborinyoka>

https://www.pindula.co.zw/Luke_Tamborinyoka/#google_vignette