



EDITORIAL

ZIMBABWE UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

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Frequently publicised pronouncements by President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe that were made before the 2005 parliamentary poll, which optimistically indicated that he might be contemplating retiring from office, have revived the ongoing speculation about the preconditions that the aging head of state would require to be in place before he relinquishes his position in government. More broadly, there has also been increasing debate about the possible shape of a post-Mugabe dispensation, and how this government might begin to tackle the serious economic and political difficulties facing this country. Even members of Zimbabwe's ruling establishment now commonly accept that the formal economy is in a state of near collapse. Whatever their publicly stated positions, leading figures in ZANU-PF admit that a return to international respectability and the resumption of aid and loan flows are urgently needed if a complete economic meltdown is to be averted. The difficulty has been in finding a common position that establishes a road map for Zimbabwe's recovery, which is both functional and acceptable to all the key stakeholders.

In order to facilitate a discussion of these topics, the African Security Analysis Programme at the Institute for Security Studies invited a small group of experts and analysts from Zimbabwe and South Africa to participate in a roundtable discussion entitled *'Zimbabwe: Imagining the future'*, before the parliamentary elections that

were held on 31 March 2005. The participants, who formally presented their views at this roundtable, authored the essays contained in this special edition of the African Security Review (ASR). The main focus of this edition of the ASR is the analysis of the on going crisis in Zimbabwe and the possible solutions to the challenges that face this country.

The delegates at the roundtable generally agreed that Zimbabwe was in a state of unprecedented crisis. There may have been differences in the articulation of the causes and nature of the crisis. Nevertheless, the participants concurred that Zimbabwe is facing a multi-layered crisis that requires a multi-pronged approach. One of the themes common in all the papers relates to the various effects that the decline in the economy has had on the domestic political balance of power. The decline of the economy and the deficit in democracy have had an effect on the living standards of the vast majority of Zimbabweans and have created a groundswell of support for opponents of the current government, whose mismanagement and corruption are seen to be at the heart of the problem. Much of this discontent is manifested through the support given to the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). In this light there must obviously be questions about the viability of the MDC in a ZANU-PF dominated parliament especially if the international community does help alleviate the economic crisis in the aftermath of an anticipated acceptable political

settlement. This systemic vulnerability of the MDC is considered by more than one of the authors.

The Zimbabwean opposition, its civil society and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region are gripped by a pervasive uncertainty as to what should be done to take Zimbabwe out of this largely self-induced quagmire. The participants agreed that the solution to the Zimbabwe crisis will have, realistically and very delicately, to balance, amongst other things, economic and political exigencies and justice and reconciliation concerns. The balance of forces in the country is too close to call and thus no single entity can go it alone.

This compilation of papers covering various topics pertaining to the crisis in Zimbabwe, was put together in the spirit of enhancing the broader understanding of the challenges facing

this country, in order to hopefully assist in the various on going processes aimed at seeking solutions to this protracted crisis. Noble efforts were made by the authors and participants of the roundtable to imagine and contribute to the creation of a better future for Zimbabwe. A future that will hopefully provide the people of this country with the freedom from want, hunger, and fear that they have struggled so hard for, particularly at a time when this country has just commemorated its silver jubilee of independence.

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