



CONVENING PARLIAMENT CONTRAVENES EARLIER DEAL

But election of an MDC member as speaker is major setback for president's plans to control legislature.

By Benedict Unendoro in Harare

President Robert Mugabe convened Zimbabwe's new parliament this week in clear violation of the agreement which governs the now stalled negotiations between his ZANU-PF and the two factions of the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, led by Morgan Tsvangirai and Arthur Mutambara.

The talks, an attempt to end the impasse which has paralysed the body politic since ZANU-PF lost the general election on 29 March, ground



Credit: Lazele

The newly elected speaker of parliament, Lovemore Moyo, pictured in parliament soon after being elected. Picture taken August 25.

NEWS IN BRIEF

- Zimbabwe's new parliament, elected on March 29, convened for its formal opening on August 26. President Robert Mugabe attended, as did a number of senior officials from the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, despite talk of a boycott by opposition members, AFP reported.
- The bigger of two MDC factions, led by Morgan Tsvangirai, was concerned that convening parliament would undermine the ongoing negotiations over whether its leader or Mugabe should wield real executive power in a power-sharing arrangement in which the former would serve as prime minister under the latter.
- As of August 26, the protracted talks between Mugabe and Tsvangirai had not produced a settlement, despite an August 16-17 summit of the Southern African Development Community, SADC, the regional grouping overseeing the negotiations. The SADC meeting signalled its assent for parliament to be convened, implying that a new prime minister and cabinet could also be named soon. This seemed to go against earlier agreements which required the power-sharing agreement to be nailed down before any governing institutions were constituted.
- On August 25, a day before the opening of parliament, the lower house elected Lovemore Moyo of the MDC's main faction as its speaker. Moyo won by 110 of the 208 votes cast. One of the two missing votes — the chamber has 210 seats — belonged to an MDC member who was arrested as he entered the parliament building. A second MDC parliamentarian detained at the same time was freed in time to take part in the secret ballot.
- ZANU-PF, with 99 seats, did not put up a candidate. Moyo was challenged by Paul Themba Nyathi, nominated by the minority MDC faction of Arthur Mutambara. Nyathi won 98 votes, although the Mutambara group has only ten seats in the lower house.
- In the upper house or Senate, ZANU-PF candidate Edna Madzongwe emerged as the winner in a contest for the post of chair, also held on August 25. She won 58 votes compared with the 28 received by Gibson Sibanda, who in this case was backed by both MDC factions.

to a halt last week when Tsvangirai refused to sign the last of a series of documents as it became apparent that he was to be no more than a ceremonial prime minister in a government led by Mugabe as executive president.

Mugabe's defiant move came in the wake of a communiqué issued by a summit of the Southern African Development Community, SADC, held in Johannesburg on August 16-17, giving him permission to convene parliament.

Mugabe moved to convene parliament after regional summit gave its assent.

The SADC decision trumped clause nine of the memorandum of understanding signed by Mugabe and the two MDC leaders on July 21, which stated that as long as talks continued, participants would not "take any decisions or measure that have a bearing on the agenda of the dialogue, save by consensus. Such decisions or measures include, but are not limited to the convening of parliament or the formation of a new government."

Analysts believe the convening of parliament was intended to pressure Tsvangirai into signing an agreement that would result in a government of national unity.

Mugabe had threatened to form a government with Mutambara's minority faction of the MDC. ZANU-PF has 99 members of parliament and if they all sided with the Mutambara faction's ten members plus Mugabe's former spokesman and now independent member of parliament Jonathan Moyo, the 100 members of the Tsvangirai faction would be outvoted.

However, not everything went Mugabe's way. In a shock development, Lovemore Moyo, the candidate for the key position of

speaker of the lower house put up by the Tsvangirai faction, defeated the Mutambara faction's candidate, Paul Themba Nyathi, by 110 votes to 98 in a secret ballot held on August 25. That put paid to Mugabe's hope of regaining the control of parliament he lost in the general election. ZANU-PF did not field a candidate for the post.

ZANU-PF did, however, triumph in the Senate or upper house of parliament, where its candidate, Edina Madzongwe, won the post of chair later on August 25. Although the March poll left the Senate split 50-50 between ZANU-PF and the opposition, Mugabe had powers to appoint senators directly. Madzongwe won with 58 votes, 30 more than her rival Gibson Sibanda, who, in this ballot, was supported by both MDC groupings.

Commentators believe the result in the lower house will have far-reaching implications.

"It seems the MDC has re-united de facto," said Alex Dhewa, a Harare resident who supports Tsvangirai. "We must remember that the split in 2005 was engineered by a small clique. We always suspected that the rank-and-file membership in Matabeleland did not support the split. Now this has been confirmed."

In the negotiations over power-sharing, Mutambara has lent his support to the arrangements proposed by Mugabe, which would relegate Tsvangirai to a toothless, ceremonial role as future prime minister.

Dhewa believes the leadership of the smaller MDC faction has been fatally compromised.

"Mutambara's political life has ended, and for him to sit at the same negotiating table as Morgan Tsvangirai and Robert Mugabe would be ridiculous," he said. "What Mutambara forgot was that the people of Matabeleland, whom Mugabe brutalised in the 1980s, would never throw their lot with ZANU-PF, so his flirtation with Mugabe was bound to see him disgraced."

More than a month after the much-vaunted signing of the memorandum of understanding and the start of negotiations mediated by South African president Thabo Mbeki and intended to last a mere two weeks, it appears that the opposing factions are no closer to reaching agreement about who should lead the country. This will complicate the selection of a cabinet, likely to be Mugabe's next step.

An analyst who requested anonymity said the solution to the country's political and economic crisis was now in the hands of both Mugabe and Tsvangirai, but that the latter would be negotiating from a stronger position than he had in the recent past.

"Mutambara's political life has ended... his flirtation with Mugabe was bound to see him disgraced" – Harare resident Alex Dhewa.

"It can be argued that Tsvangirai now commands an absolute majority in parliament and in the negotiations. With Mutambara out of the way, Mugabe can no longer push Tsvangirai around as he has been doing."

Another analyst who asked not to be named predicted that "although the political impasse is set to continue, with the economy in the state it is now, we might see a more determined effort to conclude the inter-party talks".

Others, however, believe the task of governing the country is about to become even more difficult, since Mugabe could use his extensive powers as president to overrule parliament, while the ZANU-PF-led Senate can stop the passage of legislation emanating from the lower house.

Benedict Unendoro is the pseudonym of a reporter in Zimbabwe. ■

TSVANGIRAI REJECTS MUGABE'S POWER-SHARING TERMS

Opposition leader not prepared to play second fiddle to Mugabe in a new government.

By Jabu Shoko in Harare

The contentious issue of who wields real power in a new government of national unity appears to be the key issue stalling negotiations for a solution to Zimbabwe's political impasse.

Analysts said the ball was now in the court of the Southern African Development Community, SADC, which has been leading the negotiating process. However, when the regional grouping met in Johannesburg on August 18-19, it failed to move the negotiations on, although it did give approval for parliament to convene.

On August 25, a day before the formal opening of parliament, the lower house elected Lovemore Moyo of the MDC's main faction as its speaker. Moyo won by 110 of the 208 votes cast. The ballot result was a clear victory for the MDC. ZANU-PF did not even nominate a candidate, and the remaining 98 votes went to Paul Themba Nyathi, proposed by the minority MDC faction, which has ten seats in the lower chamber.

People privy to talks claim Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the main faction of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, has rejected the post of non-executive prime minister in a new government in which Robert Mugabe would retain executive powers as both head of state and government.

According to the same insiders, the Arthur Mutambara faction, an MDC splinter group which is also participating in the SADC-sponsored



Credit: Lazele

Arthur Mutambara addresses a press conference at his house in Harare. Picture taken August 13.

dialogue, was in total agreement with proposals put forward by Mugabe and his ZANU-PF, including the appointment of Mutambara to the post of deputy prime minister under Tsvangirai.

Minority MDC faction appears to back format proposed by Mugabe.

Both Mugabe and Mutambara insisted on a five-year term for the cabinet and the use of the present constitution including 18 recent amendments to run a government of national unity.

Tsvangirai and his team of advisers, according to the sources, dug in their heels, insisting on a "people-driven" constitution — echoing the demand by major civil society organisations — within a two-year transition that would eventually lead to free and fair elections by 2010.

There are allegations that both ZANU-PF and the Mutambara camp reneged on a draft constitution agreed to by all three parties during South African president Thabo Mbeki's earlier stages as the SADC-appointed mediator for the Zimbabwean crisis.

"There has to be an injection of new ideas," said Eldred Masunungure, a political scientist who has been following the talks since their inception in July 2007. Speaking before the SADC summit took place, he said it should "take a more active role in assisting President Mbeki to resolve the impasse".

"Mbeki has done so much and but I don't think he can unlock the current logjam," he added.

Mutambara told a press conference on August 13 that his MDC faction was in agreement with Mugabe and ZANU-PF in the negotiations. He came short of blaming Tsvangirai for Mbeki's failure to clinch a deal on the night of August 12.

“At this stage in the dialogue, all the issues are agreed upon between the three parties. We are in agreement on everything except one aspect, just one aspect,” he said.

“On this one aspect, Morgan Tsvangirai requested for some time to go and reflect and consult and then come back to the process. I must emphasise that three times in our discussions, Morgan Tsvangirai was agreeable to that aspect. And thrice he changed his mind. In the end, he said he wanted an opportunity to reflect and consult and then re-engage in the process.”

Mutambara accuses Tsvangirai of chopping and changing in the talks.

Mutambara said that as far as his faction was concerned, the aspect on which Tsvangirai expressed reservations was a “non-issue” which should not have caused the talks to stall.

“The people of Zimbabwe demand a solution to their circumstances, and as a political party we are trying to play our role in terms of providing leadership in pursuit of that political settlement,” said Mutambara.

Tsvangirai, speaking the same day, said the MDC remained committed to participating in any meaningful and genuine dialogue that would urgently move the process forward.

“We are committed to a solution that ensures tangible deliverables are put on the table of Zimbabweans — a solution that must thus put the people first, not leadership positions and titles,” he said.

There are concerns, say insiders, about ideological differences between Tsvangirai, Mugabe and, to some extent, Mutambara, that have made it difficult for the protagonists to see issues in the same light.

They cite Mugabe’s fixation with the liberation struggle and his anti-imperialism rhetoric, Tsvangirai’s trade union background and Mutambara’s being still stuck “in student politics” as some of the dynamics that have failed to deliver a solution.

The Mutambara faction holds ten seats in the Zimbabwe parliament, where they had agreed to vote with the Tsvangirai faction, giving MDC a comfortable parliamentary majority.

However, warned Ernest Mudzengi, national director of the National Constitutional Assembly, the Mutambara faction could instead side with ZANU-PF — although there has been speculation that at least seven of the ten legislators involved would be opposed to throwing their lot in with Mugabe. Indeed, some have publicly stated they would refuse to do so.

“The stalling of the talks was inevitable,” said Mudzengi. “It has never been an all-inclusive negotiation. The exclusion of other stakeholders such as the civil society organisations was a mistake. All this confirms that it was all about power-sharing between three political parties.

“What we are witnessing is politicians fighting for positions and posts, nothing else. The way forward is to include everyone in finding a solution to the crisis.”

Gorden Moyo, the director of Bulawayo Agenda, said the inclusion of the Mutambara camp in the talks had presented ZANU-PF and Mugabe with many options to retain their executive powers.

“ZANU-PF went into the whole mediation with plan A and plan B. Plan B is now being put into place as Tsvangirai is failing to play ball. The Mutambara camp fits well into ZANU-PF’s political machinations.”

“The Mutambara leadership are emerging as the ZAPU of this generation,” he said, in reference to the ZAPU-PF leadership that negotiated with ZANU-PF in the late

1980s, leading to the 1987 Unity Accord — and, in effect, the end of ZAPU.

“The talks were never going to be smooth sailing,” added Moyo.

ZANU-PF officials are understood to be seething with anger after Mbeki failed to clinch a deal on the night of August 12. Some observers likened a deal between Mugabe and the Mutambara camp at the expense of Tsvangirai to the internal settlement reached between Rhodesia Front leader Ian Smith and Abel Muzorewa, Chief Jeremiah Chirau, Ndabaningi Sithole and other signatories in the 1970s.

“What we are witnessing is politicians fighting for positions and posts” — Ernest Mudzengi of the National Constitutional Assembly.

“What you see happening now is that history is repeating itself,” said an MDC insider. “When Ian Smith was cornered in the 1970s by the intensifying liberation war, the South African prime minister advised him that it was time to negotiate with the nationalists.

“However, Smith was stubborn; he ignored the nationalists in Mozambique and Zambia and instead chose to negotiate with Sithole, Muzorewa and Chief Chirau, whom he considered black moderates.

“This is the similar deal that ZANU-PF wants to sign with Mutambara, but I predict that its fate will be the same. Most importantly, losers don’t sign treaties.”

He was referring to Mugabe’s loss of the March 29 presidential election which Tsvangirai won and Mutambara did not contest.

Jabu Shoko is the pseudonym of an IWPR journalist in Zimbabwe. ■

IS ARMY OBSTRUCTING TALKS?

Some say security forces may be behind current impasse in power-sharing negotiations.

By Yamikani Mwando in Bulawayo

As the power-sharing talks in Zimbabwe drag on without a solution in sight, there are indications that the country's security chiefs could be trying to block a settlement, say observers.

Analysts fear that the influential Zimbabwean military may be being consulted during the talks and opposing the terms of any deals mooted.

While South African president Thabo Mbeki is being lauded for bringing his Zimbabwean counterpart Robert Mugabe and opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai to negotiating table for face-to-face talks — the first for a decade — the historic meeting has yet to deliver substantive results.

The talks, which began on August 10 in the capital Harare, have been put on hold after three days in order to give Tsvangirai time to reflect, said the South African president.

Taking part in the negotiations are Mugabe's ZANU-PF party, the main faction of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, led by Tsvangirai, as well as the breakaway faction headed by Arthur Mutambara.

Although according to official results, Tsvangirai won the presidential poll held in March, he did not secure enough votes to avoid a run-off with Mugabe. The opposition leader would be expected to hold executive powers in any political deal brokered — something Mugabe is also reportedly resisting.

By last week, the talks between the three leaders seemed to collapse irreparably when a deal did not



Credit: Lazele

Zimbabwe defence forces chief Constantine Chiwenga arrives at National Heroes Acre in Harare. Picture taken August 11.

materialise. Then, on August 13, the official Herald newspaper reported that Mugabe and Mutambara had signed an agreement without Tsvangirai — a report denied by Mutambara's main ally in the faction.

Zimbabwe's military chiefs said to be applying pressure behind the scenes at the political talks.

According to other reports, when a deal was close to being brokered, security chiefs met Mbeki to "consult" on the discussions. South African newspaper The Star, which cited anonymous sources, said that South African mediators had met with Zimbabwean security chiefs, who "wanted to ensure that their interests are catered for in any agreement reached".

The Zimbabwean military continues to wield power from behind the scenes in the country, and has been characterised by Tsvangirai and other critics as a "military junta".

The all-powerful Joint Operations Command — whose members include the heads of the army, intelligence service, the air force, the police and the prison service — has been accused of keeping Mugabe in power after this year's elections, which saw his popularity ebb to its lowest level since he took power in 1980.

In a May 2008 report entitled "Negotiating Zimbabwe's Transition", the influential Brussels-based think-tank International Crisis Group, ICG, noted that "senior military commanders strongly opposed to the MDC have been instrumental in preventing a democratic transition following the 29 March election".

During the March 29 elections and the June 27 presidential run-off, the military was accused by human rights groups of mobilising junior officers to conduct a terror campaign across the country, making it virtually impossible for people to vote for change.

The ICG report warned that any attempts to mediate a political agreement in Zimbabwe would have to deal with the security forces,

highlighting concerns that the military remains all-powerful in the Zimbabwe crisis.

The country's top security bosses — who are veterans of the bloody war of independence from Britain back in the 1970s — have publicly backed Mugabe in all major elections since the emergence of the MDC. They have said they expected their lower ranks not to betray what they saw as the country's struggle against "imperialism" by voting for the opposition.

This week, at the commemoration of Defence Forces Day on August 12, Mugabe thanked the army for defending the country's "sovereignty" and showered medals on 19 of the generals who backed his re-election in the one-man presidential run-off poll.

"The Zimbabwe Defence Forces have demonstrated unparalleled patriotism and professionalism in the way they have carried the constitutional role of defending our nation," he said.

In the past, these military men have said they are not ready to salute Tsvangirai if he were to become their commander-in-chief.

They have much to lose. Many of the security chiefs stand accused by rights groups, including Amnesty International, of abuses dating back to

the early years of the country's independence.

An academic at the Journalism School of the National University of Science and Technology, who spoke under conditions of anonymity, said the security chiefs could be playing power games behind the scenes and preventing an agreement being reached.

Security leaders have openly backed Mugabe and expressed hostility to the opposition in elections in recent years.

That could explain the impasse the nation is witnessing, while the public is denied access to the finer details of the negotiations.

"God knows who all the negotiating parties consult. We can only speculate," he said. "But they could be approaching the military and saying to them, 'Look, this is what we are talking about — what do you think?' — and that could mean there is still a long walk towards breaking the deadlock."

Bulawayo-based political analyst Jethro Mpofu told IWPR that the

Zimbabwe military had moved from being public servants to political activists.

"In any democratic country, the role of the military is to protect the state and the citizens, but we have here men in the higher echelons of the military that have been politicised and publicly aligned themselves to Mugabe," he told IWPR.

Yet, at the same time, ordinary soldiers are disgruntled with the system, he added.

In recent years, there has been widespread unrest within the army's rank and file, which has seen mass desertions and a poor response to recruiting calls.

A member of Mutambara's faction of the MDC told IWPR that the Zimbabwean military is "always involved in any transition" of power. However, the source refused to elaborate on security forces' involvement in the present talks, saying he was not authorised to talk to the media.

"We are hoping for the best for the country, where self-interests are put aside. We have to be careful when talking about the military as this could send the wrong signals," he said.

Yamikani Mwando is the pseudonym of an IWPR journalist in Zimbabwe. ■

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