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ZIMBABWE AFRICAN PEOPLES UNION



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Gukurahundi Outreach Programme: A Disaster We Saw Coming



Despite all the early warning signs, outcry from the general public, and premonition from ZAPU, about the dangers and senselessness of conducting an illegal, flawed and one-sided programme meant to address the Gukurahundi Genocide, President Emmerson Mnangagwa in his typical arrogant and narcissist style proceeded to commission, bless and assign the Chiefs of Matabeleland South and North – probably against their will and wisdom – to preside over a project that was clearly set to fail.

The commencement of the project was postponed several times due to lack of resources, so we were told, and that alone was indicative of challenges that lay ahead. Then there is the question of willingness,

preparedness and qualification of the Chiefs to participate in this exercise. In our view, the ideal player would have been a neutral and independent entity/persons because, for starters, Chiefs lack autonomy due to their dependency on the state for their welfare and are most likely to be biased towards the ruling party as they are often viewed as aligned to ZANU PF. Besides, the Chiefs may be used by government to promote its own agenda rather than sincerely addressing the concerns of the communities as we shall point out below. The question arises as to whether the Chiefs have a genuine desire to promote healing, reconciliation and justice.

As reports trickle in from both Matabeleland South and North there are indications that the exercise is facing stiff resistance and apathy from the targeted communities which appear to have been preselected. There are reports that several meetings across the two Provinces have been cancelled due to lack of attendance either by communities or the Chiefs and their teams simply not showing up citing lack of resources. There are disturbing reports of elderly women collapsing to the ground wailing in pain even as the process starts, stating that they are being reminded of the Gukurahundi era. It is obvious a more sensitive and professional approach is needed. There are reports that the Chief's rapporteurs at several meetings blocked villagers from asking pertinent questions. Rapporteurs are reported to have taken down names and addresses of those who did not speak in public. There is a case where a certain Chief allegedly forced his subjects to attend the meetings or risk the unleashing of a new wave of Gukurahundi.

Since last week we have seen figures in the media purporting to be representative of the attendance of villagers in the two Provinces respectively. What is worrisome are the similarities in figures released last week of 5,000 for each province, which raises questions of authenticity given the resistance from community members and the outreach teams' haphazard approach. To add to the suspicion, the figures are not accompanied by a progress report. Why?

As ZAPU we call for an alternative approach which is sincere and meant to bring closure to this national sore. The alternative should be an all stakeholders' direct engagement involving ZAPU as the primary target and juristic victim, survivors of atrocities and descendants of those who succumbed to genocide or were forcefully disappeared, the government of Zimbabwe, churches, CSOs, traditional groups, Chiefs, lawyers for human rights, academics, media practitioners, and concerned citizens in general. Regional solidarity from our fellow Africans in South Africa and Rwanda, who have experience in healing the wounds of past horrors, should also be allowed to assist us as we try to find each other based on truth telling and possible reconciliation.

The current outreach programme has not offered perpetrators of the Gukurahundi Genocide and other atrocities the chance to confess and seek forgiveness from their victims. Even generations born after the Gukurahundi era have wallowed in abject poverty, undocumented and unable to secure formal employment. The outreach programme is a small poultice attempting to cover a large festering wound. It is way too inadequate to offer meaningful redress much less healing and closure. Let us all be open and sincere in dealing with this issue which is affecting every Zimbabwean one way or the other. Gukurahundi-inspired killings, abductions, rape and destruction of property also targeted ZAPU members and supporters in the Midlands and many parts of Zimbabwe. Clearly, this is not merely a regional but national issue.