

Western Governments Seek Pretext to Maintain Zimbabwe Sanctions

Blatant interference in the internal affairs of Southern African state designed to halt economic growth agenda

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Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

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A number of imperialist states have issued a statement criticizing the Zimbabwe security forces for a decision, backed up by the judiciary, to restrict the activities of an opposition party which has a history of violent protest.

The Southern African nation has been ruled by the Zimbabwe African National Union, Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) as a dominant political force since national independence in April 1980. Since 2000, there has been the growth of the western-backed Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) which has challenged ZANU-PF in a number of elections as well as through protests and strikes.

In the most recent harmonized elections on July 30, 2018, ZANU-PF won both the parliamentary and presidential poll. Several days after the casting of ballots and prior to the announcement of the results of the voting for the presidential race, the Movement for Democratic Change-Alliance (MDC-A) called for a demonstration against the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) for allegedly rigging the outcome.

Several people were killed in the ensuing clashes between the police, military forces and anti-government protesters in downtown Harare on August 3 (2018). The unrest placed an unfortunate stain on the electoral process which had been largely peaceful.

In recent weeks, the MDC-A, just one of the factions which emerged from the original MDC, has been threatening to hold marches to protest government policies. The opposition grouping has demanded western imperialist states maintain their draconian sanctions against Zimbabwe claiming that the ZANU-PF government stole last year's election and is ruling the country through undemocratic means, including repressive measures.

Nonetheless, since the forced resignation of the first President Robert Mugabe during an internal split within ZANU-PF in November 2017, there has been virtually no unrest inside the country other than the MDC-A march which ended in violence on August 3 (2018) where in addition to several people being shot to death and wounded, several arson attacks were carried out against the ruling party offices, vehicles, along with damage to both private and public buildings in Harare.

In a joint statement on August 20, the diplomatic officials of several foreign missions including European Union (EU) members France, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Romania, Sweden and the United Kingdom, along with the missions of Australia, Canada and the United States condemned the ZANU-PF government based upon the criticisms leveled

against the administration of President Emmerson Mnangagwa by the MDC-A. In part the statement issued by the western regimes accused the Zimbabwe government of “intimidation, harassment and physical attacks on human rights defenders, trade union and civil society representatives and opposition politicians.”

These alleged human rights violations are designed to further delay the lifting of sanctions against the government. A virtual blockade by these imperialist states has been in place since the year 2000 when the Zimbabwe parliament passed a land reform bill which seized the farms of several thousand white agricultural business owners.

The land had been expropriated from the African people during the onslaught of colonialism in the late 19th century. After a protracted armed struggle led by ZANU-PF and the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU-PF), carried out from the early 1960s to 1979, the white settler-colonial regime of former leader Ian Smith conceded to the release of political prisoners, allowing refugees to return to the country and the conducting of multi-party democratic elections.

Britain and U.S. pledged to assist in the land reform process at the dawn of national independence in 1980. After two decades this promise remained unfulfilled prompting the ZANU-PF government backed by revolutionary war veterans to occupy the land held by the commercial farmers and business interests. A redistribution program was launched which granted much needed land to the African people.

Zimbabwe governmental officials responded to the western missions’ statement related to the proscription of potentially violent demonstrations by the imperialist-funded opposition forces saying:

“The Government of Zimbabwe is taken aback by the intrusive and judgmental attitude displayed by the Missions and the shocking partisanship informing the joint statement with respect to the situation in Zimbabwe. [The] Government of Zimbabwe expects those countries committed to supporting the freedom of expression, association and assembly – seen as facets for a politically stable, economic stable and prosperous Zimbabwe – to exercise impartiality and not to unduly interfere in the internal affairs of Zimbabwe in a way that promotes unrest and public disorder unless they harbor an ulterior motive.” (See [this](#))

Regional Dimensions to the Conflict

The 39th Summit of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) held in the United Republic of Tanzania on August 17-18, issued a communique calling for the immediate lifting of western sanctions against Zimbabwe. October 25 was designated as a Day of Action throughout the Southern Africa region and Africa as a whole aimed at ending the sanctions.

Image on the right: SADC delegates to the 39th Ordinary Summit



SADC specifically mentioned the renewal of sanctions against Zimbabwe by the U.S. in recent months. The summit which represents 16 member states from South Africa, Namibia and Lesotho to the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Union of Comoros, Madagascar, the Seychelles, among others nations, spoke with one voice in solidarity with the people of Zimbabwe.

Executive Secretary for SADC, Dr. Stergomena Lawrence Tax, read the communique on Zimbabwe which strongly emphasized that:

“[The] Summit noted the adverse impact on the economy of Zimbabwe and the region at large of prolonged economic sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe and expressed solidarity with Zimbabwe, and called for the immediate lifting of sanctions to facilitate socio-economic recovery in the country. Summit declared the 25 October as the date on which SADC member states can collectively voice their disapproval of the sanctions through various activities and platforms until the sanctions are lifted.” (See [this](#))

The SADC has been tasked with lobbying the current Chairperson of the AU, President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt, to extend the contents of the communique of the Tanzanian summit to the entire continental organization. In addition, President el-Sisi will be asked to raise the issue of sanctions against Zimbabwe at the upcoming 74th Ordinary General Assembly of the United Nations scheduled to take place in September in New York City.

Image below: SADC 39th Summit in Tanzania held during August 17-18, 2019



Zimbabwe President Mnangagwa expressed his satisfaction with the action taken by the SADC Summit. He told journalists on the sidelines of the gathering about the priorities of Harare noting:

“Well, as Zimbabwe, we were very pleased that this time around SADC was unanimous on the issue of sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe. We resolved that we must pronounce ourselves as SADC that sanctions on Zimbabwe should be lifted; that our secretariat should communicate that position of SADC to the AU, so that the AU chairman, at the United Nations, can also pronounce the position of SADC and the position of AU. We are happy that again it was emphatic that there was no cause or need for sanctions to continue; after all, the basis for the sanctions are not there anymore, and they were illegal at the time when they were imposed by a few Western countries, America and the EU. So, we are very happy with that.”

Zimbabwe Sanctions Contributes to Decline in Growth throughout the SADC Region

Other issues conveyed through the resolutions passed at the SADC Summit acknowledged the problems of drought, water shortages, cyclones and other by-products of climate change which are having a devastating impact on the region. South Africa, the largest industrial economy in the entire continent, has been reeling from escalating unemployment (officially 29%) due to the decline in commodity prices and the lack of foreign investment. (See [this](#))

Overall the growth rate for the entire SADC region is being stifled due to the Zimbabwe sanctions. A recently launched African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in Niger holds the potential for exponential growth and development as a result of the breaking down of trade barriers imposed through the legacies of colonialism and neo-colonialism, the adoption of a single currency and the intensification of planning on a regional basis.

Image on the right: SADC meeting on gender issues held at 39th Summit in Tanzania, August 17-18, 2019



Nonetheless, until imperialism is defeated in Africa the prospects for sustainable development will remain unstable and limited. The dependency upon the international markets for the determining of prices and terms of trade for raw materials, energy resources and agricultural commodities still being controlled by the leading capitalist states will hinder any continental efforts to build genuine cooperation and unification of Africa and its people.

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