

A Critique of the 2008 Government of National Unity and Human Rights Protection in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The protagonists parties in Zimbabwe, namely ZANU-PF and the two MDC factions agreed on 15 September 2008, to work together to halt political and economic impasse that had crippled the nation in the new millennium. This agreement (affectionately known as the Global Political Agreement (GPA)) ushered in an array of hope and paved way for the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU), which ended on the 29th of June 2013. The GNU receive mixed feelings when it comes to its successes and failures, especially on the promotion and protection of human rights, which were under-siege prior to the agreement. The calls for peace and human rights respect by GPA principals during the entire GNU era were worth noting, though not enough; as there was need for matching action to demonstrate their commitment to the cause. The parties, especially ZANU PF wielded power and state security institutions but paid lip service to the protection of civil and political liberties, hence the systematic, direct and indirect violations to notably the right to life, political participation, freedom of speech, association, assembly and expression at the hands of terror groups and security forces persisted. Even though the epoch under review witnessed the formation of Media and Human Rights Commissions, they were hampered by cheap partisan politicking, lack of funds and ambiguous mandates. This, combined with the lack of progress on institutional and legal reforms, Zimbabweans suffered during the entire GNU period, and will continue to endure abuse and live in fear of violence every day. This paper calls for constitutionalism, institutional and security sector reform as the basic and tangible efforts for human rights protection in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: Government of national unity, civil and political rights.