

## **Building for the Future: Women's Role in Conflict Resolution and Reconstruction**

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*The following is Jenni Williams' presentation given at the Wilson Center on September 13, 2005. The opinions expressed here are those of the author and in no way represent the views or opinions of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.*

We have set ourselves up as a litmus test to prove that the power of love can conquer the love of power. 'Tough Love' is our secret weapon of mass mobilization. We are mobilizing Zimbabweans for an EVEolution not a revolution.

In Zimbabwe I am also known as Ma Moyo; Moyo is a name that means heart. I am a founder of Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), a civic movement for women to speak out and hold their government accountable. Our mandate is to conduct peaceful protests in defiance of unjust laws that sanction our fundamental and God-given freedoms. Through our actions, we create space to allow the general public to articulate issues they are too scared to raise themselves.

WOZA has over 20,000 members, and they risk arrest by carrying membership cards. And I speak for the generality of Zimbabwean women who too want a better life. I also speak in defiance of new constitutional amendments that allow government to take away my passport if they deem I have criticized them. I have been called a terrorist and traitor for having alternative views. I have been arrested over 24 times in the space of 28 months for defending women's rights in Zimbabwe. They arrest me but they cannot arrest my right to enjoy all my freedoms. Neither my colleagues nor myself are intellectuals—we are just mothers who want dignity and a better future for our children. I have prepared a paper to circulate but will speak from the heart. Thank you for inviting us to share with you our experiences.

Zimbabwe is a country that attained independence from colonial rule in 1980, through a process in which an armed liberation movement (comprising two major separate elements) increased the cost of isolation and the monopoly of power exercised by the then ruling regime, forcing a negotiations that led to a peace agreement and a transition. It was sanctions and isolation that worked. But it can only work if there are checks and balances and a unity of purpose to help the people and not the politicians.

Zimbabwe is on the verge of total collapse. Its economy is in freefall, its healthcare and education systems devastated and its people starving, brutalized by a government that is intent on holding onto power whatever the cost. Yet it is a government that is desperate for legitimacy and will not accept that any of its own policies have brought Zimbabwe to this point. Anyone arguing that it is poor governance that has brought on this crisis is told that Zimbabwe is a sovereign state. How can we be sovereign when citizens can't say what is troubling them? According to Mugabe and his associates, it is not misrule and poor governance that has caused the crisis but the 'smart' sanctions imposed by America and other western powers.

The women of WOZA want those targeted sanctions to remain and be extended until the raft of unjust laws that are sanctioning us is removed. Every day we have more of our basic freedoms striped away. Don't be surprised if they start to build a Berlin Wall around Zimbabwe. Please keep the pressure on the Mugabe regime to force them to repeal their instruments of oppression. Once this happens Zimbabweans will be in a position to take it from there.

I know that there is also debate on extending these sanctions to the children of ruling party members. We have debated on this and recommend that those children should along with their parents face targeted sanctions. Our reasoning is simple why should their children be educated at Yale and Eton while ours do not have text books or even exercise books in their classrooms. We cannot afford

school fees that have just gone up 1000 percent despite the promise of free primary education. How do they pay Yale fees in foreign currency when there is no foreign currency to buy maize seed so we can grow food?

We have a saying in Africa that when elephants fight the grass suffers, WOZA is made up of suffering grassroots people who are being held hostage. The ransom Mugabe demands for our freedom is that the superpowers remove targeted sanctions. Please do not pay this ransom, even if you see a gun held to our heads. We know that the gun Mugabe holds is the same gun that was used to liberate Zimbabwe from colonial rule. These liberation guns have been turned against us and we, the hostages have to stand firm on our demands. We should not have to bargain for our rights to converse with our leaders, but how else can there be progress? Only a petrified government could be so restrictive to their citizens. Many are saying it is time for a revolution but we believe that women must conduct an EVEolution to prevent a revolution. What an incredible people Zimbabweans are not to have descended into anarchy when they have every reason to do so. But in an EVEolution can we collectively make a quantum leap into democracy.

I will now explain the Zimbabwean situation to you all and provide a testimony of what we have experienced as women human rights defenders.

### **The Daily Suffering**

Recently the Zimbabwe Ambassador to Botswana, Pelekizile Mpoko, had the gall to admit that the Government of Zimbabwe is the official custodian of the welfare of the people of Zimbabwe. This was said around debate on Operation Murambatsvina. The United Nations estimates that some 700,000 people in cities across the country have lost their homes, their source of livelihood or both. Indirectly, a further 2.4 million people have been affected in varying degrees. What a strange way to 'cater' for the welfare of the people!

Zimbabweans are worse off economically than our parents were 52 years ago. The poorest are condemned to sickness and death, unusual outside a war zone. These are the findings of the Centre for Global Development (CGD). We see the effects on a daily basis and try to live through it. Zimbabwe is an agro-based economy, but this sector dropped by a cumulative 26 percent. Severe shortages of food, fuel, electricity, essential medical drugs and hard cash, while inflation is pegged at 400 percent one of the highest such rates in the world.

While exact numbers are hard to determine, it is clear that Zimbabwe has been experiencing a 'dual economy' the formal sector and informal sector. With unemployment at over 80 percent, people resorted to the informal sector as a survival mechanism. The formal sector has been squeezed by the shortages of foreign currency, of inputs, of skilled human resources. Too much political interference has also resulted in de-capitalization and de-professionalization of the economy.

Political space has closed dramatically and over 300 opposition party supporters have faced harassments, torture and or lost their lives.

The ruling elite, a former liberation movement, have entrenched themselves to control the production and distribution of key commodities. There are massive, shortages of basic foods such as fuel, cooking oil, sugar, wheat flour, staple maize meal.

The media being 'regulated' and harassed by a partisan and 'overzealous' media Commission, and the electronic media monopolized by the ruling party through its monopoly of the state.

More than 30% of the population are living in exile, largely for economic and survival purposes and largely self-exiled during this last five year period. Many who could leave are too scared to leave their families and they stay for emotional reasons preferring to 'suffer together.'

In an attempt to shore up waning political popularity, the government began a land reform exercise. So speedily was the process implemented that nobody consulted the met office to find out about weather patterns. Due to lack of detailed planning a catastrophic collapse in agricultural production occurred. There was displacement and social dislocation of hundreds of thousands of farm workers who should have been the first to benefit from land reform. Corrupt allocation of land to the ruling elite has served to replace one racially determined elite of landowners with another politically determined elite.

Serious allegations of extensive human rights abuse, notably reported by the Mission of the African Commission on Peoples and Human Rights, a report adopted by the African Heads of Government at their Abuja meeting of January 2005, complemented by numerous other reports from Zimbabwean and international human rights organizations

Military and paramilitary units carry out the 'application' of urban byelaws, so that urban traders and long-term urban residents are forced at gunpoint to watch, or even to participate in, the arbitrary and illegal destruction of their shelters and their livelihoods. It is estimated that at least 200,000 households have been displaced by force in this current (still ongoing) exercise, affecting possibly as many as a million people or around 10 percent of the population. Was this new assault meant to keep the people from planning an uprising? It's pretty difficult to think about demonstrating when you are pre occupied with basics such as water, food and shelter.

MaDube is a case in point. She is unable to read and write, as she had to run away from her home village during the liberation war. The 'Comrades' had impregnated her when she went to feed them. Her family then lost their homestead during the 'Gukurahundi' era in the early 1980s. As a pregnant young girl, she had to accept the first man that came along. She testified recently that he abandoned her and the five children after using her as a 'tea cup.' She has been a licensed vendor since 1987, buying vegetables and selling them to her neighbors. She has educated her children and the eldest is in his last year as a teacher trainee. Well known in her area, she has become a star mobilizer for WOZA and has built a strong sisterhood of women human rights defenders.

Early June, after her traditional trip to buy a sack (90 kilograms) of vegetables, she and other vendors alighted from the bus only to be helped off load their produce by riot police who confiscated the produce. \$150,000 investment gone! She got home and was sitting contemplating her next move when there was a noise at her gate. Thinking it was a customer to buy tomatoes she had not sold the day before. She jumped up and rushed out. Six policemen where at her gate saying they had come to demolish the room her older children live in. Berating her for not having done it herself. They forced her to demolish the structure and said they would come to check if she had done it. The difference with MaDube is that she is one of 29 women arrested and tried for a demonstration against Operation Murambatsvina. On July 22, the Magistrate discharged us all saying that "women in motion cannot be found guilty of blocking a pavement." We took this ruling as tacit appreciation for our 'Tough Love' strategy.

### **Lack of Accountability**

The Wilson Center preserves the ideals and concerns of President Wilson who wanted to bridge the gap between the world of ideas and the world of policy – I realized that this is relevant to the conflict in Zimbabwe. There are too many policies at variance with the ideas of ordinary people and so the resultant lack of ownership creates chaos. There is a serious imbalance between what the people need and want versus what the politicians need and want. Without communication and agreement there can be no affinity. Where there is such an imbalance, accountability tools must be used to enforce public opinion that has been ignored. Zimbabwe's leadership came from revolutionary background where secrecy and obedience were part of the political culture. There is no clear culture of stakeholder consultation and accountability.

As mothers, we live through this lack of accountability every day. There is no health service to speak of. Some rural women must even carry water with them when they go into a maternity clinic. In January, we reminded Zimbabweans of the 1980 Election promise for free primary education; we demonstrated and then celebrated when the rumored fee increases did not materialize. However, the fees went up 1000 percent this month. So we are cruelly cheated out of this promise once again. Sadly, our reprieve was only temporary.

A powerful method of ensuring accountability is through the press. Consider that over a 100 journalists have been arrested for allegedly breaching tough state media laws. None have been convicted but many have lost their jobs due to unfair media registration processes.

The Leaders of the African Union and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) need to develop an informed, honest and objective consensus so that they can more effectively help the people of Zimbabwe. They must help us hold Mugabe accountable if they are to prevent total disaster. If they do not the economic crisis will continue to impact on their economies and Zimbabweans will continue to jump their borders seeking respite. President Thabo Mbeki recently said that Southern Africa would “sink or swim together.” It is ironic that the self-proclaimed author of African Renaissance, Thabo Mbeki, still won’t openly criticize Mugabe. African Renaissance was founded on principles of Ubuntu, a word meaning that a person is a person through other people. That chasm again between word and deed. Consider that while Zimbabwe perishes South Africa flourishes. All investment is going to South Africa, so why should Mbeki care?

### **The Nonsense**

I use this word as bluntly as Mugabe has used nonsense to play with public opinion. He uses distorted narrative to try to prevent us holding him accountable.

Brain Raftopolos states, “ZANU PF has set itself the task of establishing a hegemonic project in which the party’s narrow definition of the nation is deployed against all other forms of identification and affiliation. As Zimbabweans listen to the radio, watch television and read the daily newspapers, all controlled by the ruling party, they are being ‘informed’ about what it means to be a ‘good Zimbabwean,’ and a ‘genuine African.’ They are also being told who is the ‘enemy’ within and without and advised to confront such ‘enemies’ with ruthless exclusion if necessary. For the present this political assault has seriously closed down the spaces for alternative debates around citizenship and national belonging.” If you are not in the Zanu PF camp you don’t get jobs.

Mugabe and his cronies went further to state that Zimbabwean sovereignty is under attack by western imperialists who are sabotaging the economy to punish Harare for seizing land from whites and giving it to blacks. I tell you that it is bad policies and a lack of consultation has run down Zimbabwe’s economy. This last election according to Zanu PF was an Anti-Blair Election. One rural man mispronouncing Anti was said to ask if Zimbabweans now have an Aunty called Blair. Some people even thought that Blair was running for a parliamentary seat in Zimbabwe and that his face would appear on the ballot paper. Blair and Bush are not generally known to ordinary Zimbabweans.

Further state propaganda adverts brag that the year 2005 heralds our silver jubilee: 25 years of democracy. I ask whose democracy are we talking about? Whose sovereignty? A Zanu PF spokesperson Dr William Nhara recently said its ‘Zanu PF’s sovereignty and democracy.’ Minister of Security Didymus Mutasa is on record as saying, “We would be better off with only six million people – with our own people who support the liberation struggle. We don’t want all these extra people.” What a dismissive statement to make to the people. The partisan distribution of food and refusal to allow free access to the generality of starving Zimbabweans by the state can be seen as attempt to starve us to death emotionally and physically. The operation disenfranchising those suffering from HIV/Aids from their support structures, forcing people out of towns into rural areas a attempt to ensure Zimbabweans die quietly and painfully in remote villages.

We would not be in this mess if independence also brought democracy for the people. Our point of view as women is that we fought the liberation war alongside men for equality and empowerment not empty gestures made by a ministry for women's affairs and a female vice president who has forgotten her genetic make-up.

Zimbabweans took up arms and rejected colonialism and many a gallant fighter, including some of my own relatives died to deliver liberation. But 25 years later we still have in place state institutions that serve select groups interests. The majority that sacrificed has not been empowered politically, economically, socially or culturally. No capacity was developed to establish a culture of social justice that would serve all citizens.

At independence, Mugabe made a famous reconciliation speech calling for our guns to be turned into ploughshares. Yes, there was talk of land reform. But it was only convenient to remember that this is why an armed struggle was fought after a failed referendum to change the constitution in Mugabe's favor. It was two days after the referendum that the land invasions began. There was much talk of ploughshares but they were not put to use to feed the nation due to bad programming. So those same ploughshares once again became guns. What a vicious circle! The Zimbabwe issue is not a land issue, not a white versus black issue but an issue of poor governance and misrule.

Liberation erroneously ended with political power packaged as obtaining the vote and land. It should have proceeded to deliver social justice that would have delivered freedom for individuals – at all levels of society, including the grassroots.

### **The Need for our own Constitution**

Zimbabwe's parliament has voted on key constitutional changes to establish a Senate (Upper House) and also give the government powers to seize passports of citizens suspected of "threatening the national interest." So I may be traveling out of the country for the last time if they take away my passport. Our political leaders believe that activists should not be allowed to travel abroad calling for sanctions as I am doing in this presentation. But I cannot and will not be intimidated if I truly believe in my God given right for expression based on truth.

It is really a myth that Zimbabwe has a constitution, as the document, which is called the Lancaster house constitution, was a cease-fire agreement—not a people driven constitution. This was the seventeenth amendment and its original aim to deliver freedoms has been subverted, its spirit abused. These amendments are tantamount to rape. It was raped to produce the executive presidency, a forerunner to a one party state. It was also raped to produce the raft of unjust laws that have helped keep Zanu PF in power without the real and genuine need of a mandate from the people. And now the biggest assault on rights was fast tracked through parliament.

The amendment took into account physical disability as a prohibited reason for discrimination, and also to include a provision permitting affirmative action for those who have been previously disadvantaged by unfair discrimination. It does not remove all discriminatory provisos against women. This is missed opportunity to end discrimination against women. As we have a female vice president it is also a mystery that this achievement has not resulted in equality being top of the amendments agenda.

This bill, once signed, will prevent landowners whose land has been acquired by the state from approaching the courts; under the new law, the government can seize farmland without paying compensation and bar farmers from contesting the seizure of their properties. This effectively usurps the authority of the courts by denying people recourse to the law challenging state action that violates fundamental human rights. It will prevent people leaving the country who might threaten "the national interest, public interest, or the economic interest of the State"; Zimbabwe has in effect, become a very large prison. It will also re-establish the Senate with five senatorial constituencies per province. The

development of a senate is widely seen as a way for Mugabe to pacify divisions within the party by creating jobs for the walking ‘politically’ dead. This bill will also disenfranchise permanent residents.

### **Our Solution: Tough Love**

WOZA takes to the streets in protest. We are not intellectuals we are just mothers of the nation and we know that history shows that women are the true liberators of countries.

We call our type of civil resistance, ‘Tough Love.’ We love our country enough to sacrifice being jailed for it and the ‘tough’ because our type of love is not easy. ‘Tough Love’ is the disciplining love of a parent; we must practice it and bring dignity back to our families. As ‘Tough Love’ defenders we must keep the spirit of our crusade intact and safe from willful misunderstanding. Tough Love from the grassroots is the solution to crisis of governance in Zimbabwe. Our rulers need some discipline; who better to dish it out than the women? Gandhi and Martin Luther King provided some lessons for women in Zimbabwe to draw on. The current regime of Robert Mugabe provided the motivation to come up with our very own version to counter the propaganda nonsense. The prevailing climate of fear bred creativity and strategy to lessen the consequences. Unjust laws provided a means to make the injustices visible. We, in effect become the dispensers of justice—the living breathing litmus test!

To show the attitude that we had to cope with, I will provide a recent example. A Bulawayo Police spokesman, Inspector Smile Dube, confirmed the arrest of 12 party members putting up posters for a mayoral election in July. They were arrested for violating sections of the tough Public Order and Security Act (POSA), which bans Zimbabweans from gathering in groups of more than three people to discuss politics without police clearance. He said, “We cannot let a situation where people just go about blocking traffic, Toyi-toying and disturbing peace-loving people. They were blocking traffic and Toyi-toying and were arrested under POSA.” In contradiction, less than a month before this, 29 members of WOZA won a trial discharge after a demonstration against operation Murambatsvina. When the magistrate ruled that, “women in motion cannot block a pavement.” The inconsistencies of living in Zimbabwe are too numerous to count!

### **WOZA - Women of Zimbabwe Arise**

WOZA is an Ndebele word meaning “come forward.” WOZA binds women together so they can find courage to free themselves and become more dignified by speaking out. We also walk a fine line of being a civic movement but at the same time exercising our right to comment on political matters despite deep polarization.

Instead of feeling the warm glow of ‘love’ from our leaders, we have seen hate, been called maggots and trash and been evicted from our homes! So we adopted a symbol of love. We hold our forefinger upright, thumb vertical to make an L shape signifying LOVE. When we show this sign we say Woza Moya to call for a spiritual healing of our nation. This helps keep us focused and builds hope that democracy is around the corner.

To celebrate our femininity, we adopted imaginative ways of highlighting our issues. We have also used United Nations recognized days such as World Refugee Day and International Women’s Day to put forward every day issues affecting our well being. This has helped us to be effective and be able to bear the consequences and continue to grow the women’s movement. We adopted the highest risk option of demonstration in one of the most repressive countries, packaged it with love and determination, added strategy and tactics that have worked and made WOZA a force to be reckoned with. But most of all we took a nation without a means of holding leaders accountable for day to day suffering and showed them how groups can form an outlet to speak out. By this we avoided becoming victims and in a strange way enjoy some fun and freedom. Some of my happiest moments have been in mid demonstration with riot police about to descend or in cramped jails singing freedom songs that echo in the soulless corridors.

To stop the hate and show love and courage despite risking arrest, we marched with roses and valentines cards on Valentine's Day. We conducted this demo three years in a row and over 120 women have been arrested for calling for the power of love to conquer the love of power. Imagine being arrested for giving out red roses. To show that we need to face the crisis head on to end the suffering, we marched with grass brooms symbolically sweeping away the suffering. To show that the economy was crashing and disposable income diminishing, we demonstrated outside the Reserve Bank giving people sweets with a message that they would soon not be able to afford them. What better time than World Refugee Day to talk about being displaced from our homes. We told the world that we were refugees in our own country!

Tough Love is practiced by WOZA women from 16 to 80 years of age—simple women trying to survive with dignity. The secrets to our success have been as follows.

We were able to blend femininity with the tough stuff – street action. We are mostly able to capitalize on the cultural aversion to a man beating a woman in public. So when the riot police (mostly men) come across us with batons raised, they see their mothers and sisters processing peacefully to deliver a message. The fight mostly goes right out of them. There have also been times that we have been beaten black and blue! Our high-risk mandate means we have to cope with consequences. We knew that arrests month after month could wear us down. We relieve our stress by conducting lots of meetings within communities. Our agenda prepares them for action by discussing their issues so they can own the issue and be willing to face the consequences of speaking out. We had to cater for the prevailing climate of fear and the propaganda spread that only 'traitors criticize.' We came up with strategies and tactics and wove these into a new standard of behavior for members. We call this our Sisterhood Promise.

We have and implement a strict leadership code. Only those prepared to be in the street can lead. This means that ordinary women became and are leaders. The intellectuals unfortunately are card-carrying members, being prepared for the streets bit by bit. To make the unjust laws visible, one has to sacrifice and suffer consequences. While putting pressure on the regime to repeal unjust laws, we had to be willing to submit to arrest for ignoring these laws. If we remain silent in our homes, Mugabe would use the lack of demonstrations to say what happy people we are; we simply could not allow that to happen. So we teach arrest protocols and how to behave under arrest.

As we knew we had to submit to arrest and possibly be tortured we had to have good linkages with journalists so we could quickly let the world know. It has been said that WOZA's success has been a combination of 'act and publicize.' The basis of our branding and power comes from creating newsworthy events and then generating fast track publicity worldwide. A policy of 'act and publicize' is what has taken helped take WOZA to its current level. If we had just acted and relied on publicity it could not have worked as the local press were suppressed and too scared to lose their licenses or be imprisoned. The international media were chased out and in effect, we became our own newsroom, making and delivering news worldwide. We had to cope with journalists who themselves are under fire and therefore would only cover from a distance. To get around the idea that 'speaking was also acting,' we conducted advocacy training to break the habit of perpetual complaining and mobilize them to act. We had to teach that WOZA women act on their displeasure. Moaning never changed anything!

We had to empower the much disempowered under crisis conditions with knowledge and skills. We had to take ordinary women and make them extraordinary by teaching them non-violence, how to find unlimited courage when fear prevailed. Because of laws like the Public Order Security Act (POSA), we work mostly underground conducting strategy training on non-violence and women's rights. But we had to be able to convert invisibility into high visibility within short periods and capitalize on the element of surprise. The omnipresence of WOZA appearing and disappearing at will, must be quite alarming for the police! Many of them have attributed supernatural powers to WOZA women.

We had to learn to mobilize quickly on topical issues if we were to hold the state accountable for the suffering they were unleashing. A 440-kilometer walk to protest the passing of the NGO Bill. It was planned, mobilized for and implemented within 4 weeks. It is the longest protest march in the history of Africa. We had to become adept at communicating to Zimbabweans without benefit of a free press. So we produced and distributed a newsletter hand to hand. This same newsletter is also distributed as we march and many a time there are traffic jams as cars stop to grab our *Woza Moya*. We knew we could face being jailed for up to two years if convicted for organizing demonstrations so we had to cater for this in our legal strategy. It makes for a powerful lobbying point with magistrates when women are arrested on International Women's Day. We asked: is it not within our constitutional right to celebrate it?

We had to be all-inclusive in a climate of exclusion of people along party political lines. Our activities are centered on our being an issue-based movement. We are relevant and led by mothers whose priorities are daily survival and bread and butter issues. So we said, if you had breasts/vaginas, those were your WOZA membership cards. We know that everyone can experience love and that love is in itself a powerful motivator. We teach that love can conquer hate and that the power of love overcomes the love of power – sooner or later! Love is a successful mobilizing tool and I am yet to find someone who can argue this point. When you take the high moral ground, very few can argue and if they do they look foolish! So we use love to mobilize WOZA women to achieve feats of courage to stand up and speak out when common sense was dictating fear, silence and consent. The Mugabe regime boasts degrees in violence. Traditionally, women are fearful of violence and yet if they face it they can achieve so much? In the midst of hate and violence, we choose to show love. Most of all we had to show love for our beloved Zimbabwe even if it were in ruins. We had to do something to nurse it back to health. What is a country if no one loves it?

In practicing tough love and making injustices visible, over 700 women have been arrested in the last three years. It is routine to spend up to 48 hours in custody for praying in public, conducting a sponsored walk on a highway; handing a petition to parliament; singing a song about freedom; marching on international women's day. But we remain undeterred and continue to exercise our voices to speak out about the situation. We hold political leaders accountable to all Zimbabweans and to ourselves as self-appointed handmaidens of democracy!

I will mention some of our campaigns. In February, we urged Zimbabweans to understand that the power of love can conquer the love of power and went around the country teaching how to distinguish between these two kinds of love. In March, we asked Zimbabweans to vote to end the suffering of their sisters. We also reminded them of post electoral fraud by the Mugabe regime. As the election result would be announced on April 1st, the theme "Who is Fooling Who?" was part of our advocacy slogan. At 7 pm, on election night, as the police vehicle drove in and officers ranted and raved, we all knew what 'results' would be announced April 1. Later, 265 of us sat in police custody listening to the babies crying. Their cries for food went unanswered as lawyers were denied access to us—we looked at each other knowingly. We predicted that the election would be 'daylight robbery.' That night heavily booted police officers walked upon the backs of many WOZA women, beating buttocks, making the women count out aloud as they were given their beatings. Over 150 had to receive medical treatment. Many women still bear the scars of that night's beatings and one is still healing from a fractured skull caused by a booted foot to the head.

We in WOZA believe that we must work to break the chain of oppression—some say that Rhodesia had an elite group of capitalists ruling over and oppressing people with unjust laws based on inequality and if so, little has changed. We now have Zimbabwe and a black elite group of capitalists ruling over and oppressing people with unjust laws based on inequality. What has changed? What goes around comes around!

At one level, I can say I have the competitive edge as a female freedom fighter but I pay a heavy price on some fronts. Zimbabwe is a patriarchal society. WOZA has managed to work exactly because of the dismissive, 'what can women do' attitude. We have to go through harsh interrogation and



harassment and many women have been beaten, but generally women have ‘done more with less consequence’ than the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) opposition. Dictators do not like their power challenged and as WOZA are not a political party and we do not want to be in parliament we are viewed as not much of a threat. What surprises we have in store for more who think we are the weaker sex.

I have been arrested over 24 times in 30 months. I was once arrested twice in one day and have had to hand myself in twice. I have faced three trials but been discharged all three times. I spend weeks or months at a time in safe houses. My family has been sent into exile to protect them—but these sacrifices are but celebration of my rights as a citizen. We believe that the antidote for suppression is expression. I spent six month on the ‘run’ though this year and every day as I dressed, I dressed for jail.

Many police officers refuse to call me by my married name as I am ‘trouble’ and cannot possibly be a submissive married woman. But in response I simply show them the love sign. Many a time we have in effect conducted a ‘workshop’ for our jailers acting out the role of a mother and teaching how the country can be rebuilt if we have love in our hearts. Once, a police officer in a B car stopped me in the middle of an intersection to tell me he was ‘missing me.’ Even senior police officers have recognized our ‘celebrity’ by coming to introduce themselves to us and shaking hands through the bars. We could write a book about tragic comedy. I recall having been beaten and after handing myself in a police officer refused to believe that I had been beaten so I pulled down my pants and showed him. Needless to say he was a doubting Thomas no more!

### **Re-establishing the Rule of Law: The Need for a Form of Impeachment**

The rule of law has been so corrupted that we will need impeachment of political leaders if we are to re-establish a just society. Such impeachment needs to cater to past present injustices such as bringing to book the architects of operation Murambatsvina, colonial and Gukurahundi era. Zimbabweans must be able to see a just application of laws and see judgments be upheld. How can they believe in justice if they never see it? It would need to begin with a Truth and Reconciliation Commission similar to the South African Commission.

We support fully, calls to impeach Robert Mugabe and members of his cabinet and call upon the United Nations Security Council to hear our cries. We encourage Australia and New Zealand and any other states to press for the indictment of Robert Mugabe by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for crimes against humanity.

### **Dream of an Open Society**

We need society to be opened up. Is civic society doing enough and doing it independent of partisanship? Without creating and stabilizing an open society, no elections can be deemed to be free and fair. In public relations language planning an event is 80 percent organize and 20 percent event. This should be true for the election process. The ‘80 percent’ organize is opening up democratic space in society—allowing people to think freely, talk freely and interact freely—this is the role of civic organizations, faith based and developmental organizations. Then the election itself is the ‘20 percent’ part and although it should be monitored independently, this part of the event belongs to politicians.

In WOZA we have tried to open up an unused path hidden by the weeds and thorny bushes. That path links the grassroots community to the intellectuals and visa versa, and the intellectuals to political leaders. And it leads us all to holding each other accountable and creating a better future for our children. Bottom up and top down conversations!

By setting the example of how we operate, we are hoping to help take civic organizations back to the community. To help us civic society need to re-evaluate its roles and responsibilities. After independence, the civil and human rights sector became lulled into a false sense of security. I know

this is the same in South Africa. We made the mistake of starting to work on supporting the new governments. Developmental aid projects abound, and then we became too preoccupied with what a good relationship we have with the 'new' government. Then advocacy on rights cease to be a priority. Suddenly the very same hands that liberated are now those abusing rights and long gone is our impartiality that helps us to brandish accountability. Civics have to be faithful to their role as civil rights defenders. Africa needs to include in their school curricular civil rights. Just as children go to school for math and geography, so to should citizens learn their civil and human rights and how to safeguard them creatively and actively. The moral to the story is always be prepared for infringements. Have many watchdogs, so often the press becomes disempowered and people need alternatives in place.

The warning signposts for us to look out for are as follows:

- Regimes that begin to ignore social, economic and cultural realities of their citizens.
- The passing of laws with claw back phrases and selective application of laws.
- Interference with the running of non-governmental organizations like the attempt to pass the NGO Bill in Zimbabwe.
- Politicizing of state police and army.
- Parliament must take its rightful place above politics.
- Closing down of the independent press or the curtailment of independent registration of journalists.

### **Balancing Patience and Great Need**

We need Food for over three million people, medicine and antiretroviral treatment. Only thirteen thousand benefit, but three million must to be able to access this lifeline. We need help to educate our children, as we no longer can rely on informal trading to pay school fees. Zimbabweans live with death on a day-to-day basis; I have come to accept this but found it hard to understand. Then I lived amongst starving people who are statistics for intellectuals and it changed my life. But I would be doing a disservice to the people I represent if I told you that the cause of death is due to drought and disease. Our people need more advocacy on HIV/AIDS, they need true land reform and to learn how to grow food. But the real reason for our people dying is because of the 'drought of governance.' There is a saying that comes to mind: "Hope too long deferred makes the heart sick." I defend my right to accuse our leaders of perpetrating a 'drought of governance' on their own citizens.

Sometimes grassroots advocacy needs to be done on teaching the very fundamental right to human dignity, to shelter, to employment, to education and to health care. Especially as the crisis in Zimbabwe has rendered these fundamental rights null and void. We were once the bread basket of Africa; now it seems we are a basket case. The situation is rendered catastrophic due to the over politicization of Zimbabwe and the use of food as a political weapon by the ruling party.

Humanitarian aid agencies are often refused access not by the people but by the politicians who are usually overweight. My message to Mugabe and the world is that human beings are not expendable. This is obvious to any right thinking person but must be said; why do leaders need reminding? The current trend of our government refusing to allow aid in means sickness and death to many. We worry that aid agencies finding it hard to 'side step' sabotage could easily give up helping us. An example is the blankets and food coming by road by South Africa churches. They have had to call upon the patience of saints to get through the red tape and still months later they battle on while the people remain hungry and cold.

According to UN relief officials our government refused a US\$30 million (\$43.5 million) UN emergency fund-raising drive to provide food and medicine as the text of a report was not agreed. We cannot eat the 'text'! A UN official Jan Egeland also confirmed, "Life expectancy has plummeted from around 63 years in later 1980s and early 1990s to 33.9 years in 2004. This is a meltdown. This is

a nearly halving of life expectancy.” By his actions, Mugabe took the food out of hungry mouths giving credence to the view that he believes that he owns both Zimbabwe and Zimbabweans and the right to live or die of both.

The difference is when Egeland says it he is denied access to bring food to needy people. When women say it, we are arrested and still denied food whilst in jail but at least we know we have put pressure and Egeland knows that we are hungry and he will hopefully keep trying to get food to us. We urge the international press to continue to highlight the man-made disasters in Zimbabwe. The government response is to continue to chase people into the rural areas so Egeland cannot find them or hear their cries.

I come from drought prone arid Matabeleland where millions are starving. I have been to rural homes where there is not a trace of food in the kitchen. You have to see it to believe it. But Mugabe says we are choking on food! What an insult to starving people. The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS) confirmed shortages of draft power, the late onset of the rains, and shortages of seeds in the early part of the 2004-05 agricultural season, major crops were planted late and failed. About 3.3 million rural people have been unable to obtain all the food they needed at the peak of the hunger period. Picture a hungry old man with a single plough trying to create furrows on his land, in the blazing hot sun. How can he hope to succeed in time to feed his family?

The needs of our children are great. UNICEF, the UN Children's Fund, reported that 250,000 children were homeless. This has added to the orphan's crisis. The national plan of action for orphans within the social welfare ministry admits that Zimbabwe is struggling to cope with one of the world's highest numbers of AIDS orphans amid an economic crisis that is pushing children deeper into poverty and hardship. About one in five children in Zimbabwe has been orphaned by AIDS, a pandemic that is hitting the southern African country hard as anti-retroviral drugs are not widely available and the economy is collapsing. Between 1.1 and 1.3 million children have lost one or both parents to AIDS in a child population of 5.8 million, according to the social welfare ministry. Zimbabwe has one of the world's highest proportions of orphaned children. High mortality from AIDS means that, “a Zimbabwean child is orphaned every 20 minutes.” Only 20,000 Zimbabweans out of an estimated 1.8 million living with AIDS are receiving life-prolonging drugs under the government's anti-retroviral rollout program. A government survey carried out in 2002 identified about 50,000 households headed by a child under 15. A teacher recently told me that she conducted a survey and not one child in the classroom had a conventional family.

### **Gaps in Social Justice**

The liberation war has unfinished business! Social justice was never delivered, so our people remain disempowered. Social justice is an aspect totally neglected by state and non-state actors. Come to Zimbabwe and you will feel and see that our people are in a constant state of fear, wanting and waiting, fear of their own leaders whom they can only elect in a state of fear. Wanting and waiting for those same leaders to notice that they are thinking human beings with needs. Our people were excited at independence, excited at the prospect of social justice. Our people were excited in 2000 when the land invasion began; they thought the waiting was over. Land reform was dubbed the ‘People First’ program—could this mean social justice? No it did not! It was in reality ‘people last.’

According to reports, public money invested in social justice program essentially stopped in 1990. There was a massive spending program on education and health in the 1980s to address the legacy of inequality inherited from the colonial era. These programs were mainly paid for by external donors and not from money allocated from the public purse. Hence, no ‘buy in’ or investment.

The social justice we are waiting for encompasses many issues:

- The right to consent and or refuse participation, consultation and to participate at all levels of governance in matters of families’ well being. Repeal all unjust laws.

- The creating of a culture of accountability in the political leadership and empowering Zimbabweans with an understanding of its use.
- A genuine housing program that caters to the right to be consulted. If only there had been consultation two and a half million of us would not be displaced today! How disrespectful.
- The right to land with sustainable support in place, prioritized to make agriculture take the lead in restoring economic growth and empowering the masses. Our leaders don't seem to realize that crops take time to grow and be harvested!
- Job opportunities that go with a living wage that we can dialogue for without facing arrest. Supply and costs of basic necessities that we can buy freely without having to produce a party card. A leveling of the economic playing field so that there is genuine equal opportunity for all to rid themselves of a life of misery and poverty and flourish and prosper.
- Eradicating patronage and constituting an independent Corruption Commission.
- There is a tremendous need for rehabilitation of the social fabric. We will need to heal the psychological scars of those that have suffered physically – we are a traumatized society. Women have borne the brunt of this unrelenting violence.
- Reinstall a moral culture within our youth, as there has been brutalization of youth through the so-called National Youth Service or Youth Militias. Many of our daughters have been raped in the militia and this is something that was also the case during the liberation war.
- We want to be socially empowered so we can hold our head up high and say we fought a liberation war and the people eventually won!
- Conduct an international audit of Zimbabwean expertise in the diaspora. Make Zimbabwe livable so that the 3 million in exile can come home. Nurses, doctors, medial and other professionals will be needed to rebuild the health sector.
- Education for the future. One of the promises of the liberation struggle was for free primary education. Bring the teachers back; give them the independence they need to rebuild our education system.
- We also want an end to marginalization of Matabeleland. My Matabele friend, George, reminded us that it is our resources, which fuel the economy of the country. In spite of the Matabele being a minority, we contribute 40 percent of the country's GDP. Our coal makes Zimbabwe's tobacco competitive. Our electricity illuminates the whole country and powers the industries. Matabeleland's tourism and beef bring the limited foreign currency. It is their timber, which decorates homes and anchors railway lines throughout the country. It is their gold, chrome, cement, nickel, iron ore and other minerals, which are the mainstay of the country's economy.
- The liberation struggle provides key lessons for women human rights defenders. Women are 52 percent of the population and are the foot soldiers in many a liberation war, but few make it to leadership roles. Women participated equally but the promises made at the time were empty gestures. WOZA is working to ensure that the advances made now have deep roots, so that women play their part in an equal and strong Zimbabwe of the future. The equality issue struggle must continue long after the current crisis has normalized. Never let it slide from our agendas.
- We are aware that increasing tourism is a 'quick fix' in any country. Right now how many of you would honestly be prepared to visit Zimbabwe?

We call not for armed struggle but for commitment from all citizens to show 'Tough Love' in their daily activities. Hate and violence cannot build or construct. Only love can conquer all and bring freedom to Zimbabwe. A social justice program, an EVEolution not revolution, will complete the unfinished business of the liberation war. The women of WOZA stand ready to actively lead the way to a brighter future in a beautiful country we are still proud to call home. Tough Love!