

Hard Realism As World Greet New-Look Zimbabwe

Written by Rudi Prinsloo
Thursday, 12 February 2009 09:19 -



Zimbabwe's former colonial ruler Britain and Europe Wednesday hailed Morgan Tsvangirai's appointment as premier but stressed that the ruined and divided nation's road to recovery was long and uphill.

"Morgan Tsvangirai's appointment offers the possibility of a change for the better," said Foreign Secretary David Miliband in London.

He said the opposition leader -- a persistent thorn in the flesh of veteran President Robert Mugabe -- and his team "have a formidable challenge in bringing legitimacy and reform to Zimbabwe's government." Tsvangirai's swearing-in Wednesday caps nearly a year of turmoil that began last March, when he won a first-round presidential vote that was greeted with nationwide political violence, mostly against his supporters.

Hoping to end the unrest that left at least 180 dead, Tsvangirai pulled out of the run-off and left Mugabe to claim a one-sided victory denounced as a farce by the world community.

The European Union, which like the United States has slapped sanctions on Mugabe and his inner circle, expressed hope that the new administration would be able to end years of political and economic crises which have bled the country dry.

"This is an important step towards democratic rule in the country.

The EU hopes that the formation of the new government will lead to an immediate end to political violence and intimidation... and the stabilisation and recovery of Zimbabwe," it said in a statement.

In a separate communique, EU Development Commissioner Louis Michel said the new unity government "has a heavy responsibility to ensure positive change for its citizens.

"All parties within this power-sharing government must now work, without delay, to immediately improve the social and economic conditions for the people of Zimbabwe," Michel added.

South Africa brokered the unity deal, which was signed on September 15 but stalled amid protracted talks on how to distribute cabinet posts and share control of the security forces.

Those concerns were finally addressed when the parties agreed to name co-ministers to home affairs, which oversees the police, and to create a new National Security Council that will give all parties control of the security forces.

Zimbabwe's southern neighbour South Africa, which has seen an estimated three million people cross the border into its territory during the crisis, described the moment as an "important milestone" for national healing.

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"South Africa and indeed the entire (southern African) region stands ready to support the people of Zimbabwe morally, politically and economically as they embark on this difficult path of reconstruction and development of their country," President Kgalema Motlanthe said.

Today's Zimbabwe -- steered by Mugabe since its 1980 independence from Britain -- bears virtually no relation its former self when it was regarded as a model economy and its currency was on a par with the British pound.

Now it has the world's highest inflation rate, the currency is in freefall and more than half its population needs emergency food aid.

Unemployment is at 94 percent and a cholera epidemic has hit nearly 70,000 people since August, killing about 3,400.

Source : Sapa-AFP /po/ks

Date : 11 Feb 2009 19:21