



Monitors' News

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21st February Movement Celebrations – School Closures

Wednesday witnessed yet another poignant news that was to violate the right to education of many school going children in Matabeleland region particularly Bulawayo province. In view of the foregoing, school going children both primary and secondary were told not to attend Thursday and Friday lessons in anticipation that their school facilities would accommodate 21st Movement guests to the President's birthday festivities on the 25th February, 2017 at Rhodes Estate Preparatory School (REPS) in Matobo District.¹ Added to this, in some schools, students were explicitly told that the long weekend was meant to pave way for those that would want to attend the 21st Movement celebrations yet others treated the issue with hesitancy citing that it was a government directive to have such a 'holiday'. In a telephone interview with one receptionist at Khumalo primary who highlighted that, *'We have been told to suspend Thursday and Friday lessons by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in unclear circumstances.'*² Such reverberations of temporary school closure was received with varied reactions by both parents and civic organizations in the region who criticised the government for its unprecedented abuse of power that violates the right to education for children in the region. While parents were more concerned with the violation of the right to education of their children, civic organisations in the region questioned the legitimacy and constitutional grounding of the 21st Movement celebration for it to affect the day to day learner ship environment of students. As the wrangle heightened in social media platforms with some quarters attacking the government stance yet others championing the movement celebrations, Hon. Lazarus Dokora was swift in dismissing the temporary school closure as hoax and gross fabrication bent on demonizing the celebration.³ The permanent secretary in the Ministry of Education equally concurred with the views of the minister but however confirmed that a chosen number of schools would accommodate visitors envisioned to attend the 21st Movement celebrations.

In Nkulumane and Nketha constituencies residents have noted with concern an increase in the number of unfamiliar faces who they suspect to be either state security agents, war veterans or members of Zanu PF from other provinces. The residents fear that this increase could result in politically motivated human rights violations and the general instilling of fear in residents.

In a related matter Zanu PF youths organised a march through the streets of Bulawayo yesterday. While political parties have the freedom to express themselves in this manner the concern was that some youths who participated did so with a belief that there would be handouts from which they would also benefit. While some marchers indicated they had been forced to attend, ZPP is particularly worried about the hate language that youths used denigrating opposition leaders. The use of hate language is breeding ground for conflict and in some instances for physical violence.

VOICES FROM MATABELELAND: REACTIONS TO 21ST MOVEMENT CELEBRATIONS ON SCHOOL SHUTDOWN



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Concern over children's right to education

'I find it difficult to understand how Zanu Pf fails to separate party politics from government functionalities. How can they expunge twelve hours of our children's lessons in favour of a two hour event? Are they going to compensate them? This is just unfair' (Civic society activist, Bulawayo Metro)

Disappointment

'When we received news from our children that the Thursday and Friday lessons were to be suspended, we were not surprised. In fact it confirmed that the Zanu PF led government is still hostile to the region up to the point of robbing our kids their entitlement of learning.' (Community elder, Nkulumane)

Marginalization

'The government directive to shutdown Matabeleland region schools in preparation of the 21st Movement celebration, is a direct conspiracy to under develop the region in having brilliant minds. It is the same crop of leaders who champion and subscribe to unqualified stereotypes that we [Ndebele people] are uneducated and survive on pillage and plunder. This is unacceptable.' (Local War Veteran, Nkulumane)

Fear to declare it a holiday

'I think sooner than later, this day will be declared a national holiday. I say so because it has assumed a powerful charge up to the point of derailing school lessons.' (Parent, Nketha)

Always an unfortunate region

'Why should it be Matabeleland schools that are subjected to such directives? I doubt they behave that way when other regions host such celebrations. Indeed we are subjects rather than citizens.' (Parent, Makokoba)

Euphoric over long weekend

'When we got to school, we were told to go back home and report to school on Monday. Our headmistress made it clear that it was a long weekend to relax while pondering and celebrating the birthday of our president' (Student, Tshabalala)

Breach of right to information



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'Apart from violating the right to education of our children, they equally expropriated our right to information. I say this because they did not consult and notified us before enacting such a decision.'

(Teacher, Bulawayo Metro)

No powers to initiate changes

'Sometimes parents put the blame on us, but well we are just recipients to convey messages to our students. Yes, it is unfair but what can we do! If nothing is done to avert such, our students will forever be the victims of the opaque system without clear policies' (Senior school teacher, Tshabalala)

SCHOOLS THAT WERE ON SHUT DOWN

NAME OF THE SCHOOL	AUTHORITY	LEVEL	DISTRICT	LOCATION
Foundation College	Trustee	High	Byo Metro	City Centre
Maphisa Primary	Government	Primary	Mzilikazi	Tshabalala
Mgoqo Primary	Government	Primary	Mzilikazi	Nkulumane
Mgiqika Primary	Government	Primary	Khami	Nketha
St Columbus	Trustee	High	Mzilikazi	Makhokhoba
Nketha Primary	Government	High	Mbizo	Nketha
Nkulumane High	Government	High	Mzilikazi	Nkulumane
Ihlathi High	Government	High	Mzilikazi	Tshabalala
Senzangakhona Primary	Government	High	Mbizo	Emganwini
Inyanda High	Government	High		Luveve
Emganwini Primary	Government	High	Mbizo	Emganwini
St Thomas Aquinas	Private	Primary	Byo Metro	