

Constituency Electoral Environment

Review

MWENEZI EAST CONSTITUENCY

1. Introduction

A by-election for Mwenezi East by-election is scheduled for the 8th of April 2017. Statutory Instrument 2017-25A-Proclamation 1 of 2017 announces that 17th February 2017 shall be the nomination day while the Election Day will be on 8th April 2017. Mwenezi East constituency became vacant after the death of Hon. Joshua Moyo (MP) in December 2016. The constituency was previously led by Hon. Kudakwashe Bhasikiti who lost the position after being expelled from the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). In this review, we reflect on the constituency's past and present electoral environment, human rights violations and possible developments ahead of the scheduled by-election.

2. Mwenezi East Constituency

Mwenezi East constituency is in Masvingo Province and it is made up of 8 wards (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 13, and 18). The constituency has been represented by ZANU-PF candidates in Parliament, hence the view that it is traditionally a ZANU-PF stronghold. Mwenezi East residents mainly rely on subsistence farming, but this source of livelihood is hampered by poor rains. The constituency has not been spared from the economic hardships that have become widespread in the country. Most of the inhabitants, as a result, participate in cross border activities given their proximity to Beitbridge border post, a gate to South Africa. With high unemployment in the area, most youths left for South Africa. A total of about 31,10% of households in Mwenezi district are female headed families as their husbands are mainly based in South Africa, for employment.¹

It is of interest to note that Chingwizi transit camp, where people displaced from the Tokwe Murkosi Dam area were relocated, is in this Mwenezi East constituency. In the past, the displaced victims were not eligible to vote, but in this by-election there are indications that the population will be given an opportunity to vote which ideally should increase the number of voters in the constituency by 40 000.²

¹ 2011 Parliament research department: Mwenezi east constituency profile.

² News Day (2016) ZEC in Chingwizi Headache. <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2016/12/20/zec-chingwizi-headache/>

3. Historical Electoral Environment and Violence Actors

Since the year 2000, Mwenezi East has been represented by ZANU PF candidates in Parliament. That makes the constituency customarily a ZANU-PF stronghold. Between 2000 and 2005 elections, Mwenezi had one constituency that was led by Isaiah Masvayamwando Shumba (ZANU PF). A delimitation process held ahead of the 2008 elections split the constituency into Mwenezi East and West constituencies. Mwenezi East constituency was then led by Kudakwashe Bhasikiti who fell out of favour with the party leading to Honourable Moyo taking over from him through an unopposed by-election in July 2015. Both Shumba and Bhasikiti led violent election campaigns such that they were even listed on the European Union sanctions list.³ Generally, the constituency has been affected by political violence including rape, murders, arson, political intimidation, land invasions and harassment of perceived political opponents.

In the year 2000 and 2005, Isaiah Masvayamwando Shumba led a violent political campaign which involved land invasions, rape cases and assault. Both Bhasikiti and Shumba grabbed Montana Ranch and perpetrated violence against those who opposed their actions.⁴ Also, in 2000, schools such as Neshuro Primary and Secondary schools and Mushava Primary and Secondary schools were closed as violence intensified. Some female teachers were reportedly raped as war veterans under the leadership of Edmore Hwarare led the violence in support of Shumba.⁵

In 2008, Bhasikiti also led a violent election campaign in 2008 and 2013. He, Bhasikiti, sponsored the youths with food and refreshments during this time as well as incentives. Together with other ZANU-PF members, Bhasikiti set up more than 8 bases in the area. The bases were led by military leaders including Lieutenant Colonel Muchono.⁶ In 2011, "Retired Colonel Bester Magwizi accused two former ZIPRA and ZNA soldiers, Captain Solomon Ndlovu and Col Tshudina Moyo for leading a terror campaign against MDC supporters in the Maranda area of Mwenezi."⁷

Other people implicated in the Mwenezi East election violence include the Zimbabwe National Army officials such as Major Zvorwadza, Major Moyo and ordinary soldiers namely Officer Gono

³ The Africa Report (2012) Betrayal Fears After the EU Sanctions Ease on Zimbabwe. February 2012.

<http://www.theafricareport.com/Southern-Africa/betrayal-fears-after-eu-sanctions-ease-on-zimbabwe.html>

⁴ Kulare, M. (2010) Woe To You Masvayamwando and Bhasikiti. <http://thezimbabwean.co/2010/01/woe-to-you-masvayamwando-and-bhaskiti/>

⁵ NGO Forum (2000) Update on Rape, Health Workers and Teachers.

<http://www.hrforumzim.org/publications/reports-on-political-violence/update-on-rape-health-workers-teachers/>

⁶ Mugabe Ordered Deployment Of Army To Crush Opposition In 2008 Polls:

<http://zimbabweelection.com/2016/03/15/mugabe-ordered-deployment-of-army-to-crush-opposition-in-2008-polls/>

⁷ Radio VOP (2011) Soldiers Continue Violence in Masvingo. <http://www.radiovop.com/index.php/national-news/5441-zim-soldiers-continue-violence-in-masvingo.html>

and Musekiwa. Mashingi a ZANU-PF District Vice Chairman, Regina Tasiyana (ZANU-PF District official) and Justin Sithole (ZANU-PF commissariat) were also involved in political violence in the 2008 and 2013 Mwenezi East elections. Youths who corroborated in violence in the constituency include Passmore Chipuriso, Constance Muperi, Joseph Shumba, Innocent Chauke, Forbidence Phiri and Innocent Mulaudzi. War veterans mostly noted in perpetrating election violence include; one Mr Ndlovu from Maranda, Mr Masootcha and Mr Madhuvira.

Notable victims and survivors of the aforementioned violence include Kennedy Dube and Stanley Mapuranga who allegedly died after being abducted and tortured in torture bases established by Kudakwashe Bhasikiti and his ZANU-PF colleagues.⁸ Lameck Muripo was killed and his house was burnt by Kudakwashe Bhasikiti's aide Nhamo Machacha in 2008.⁹ Sadly, Machacha was also killed by the deceased's child in revenge. In June 2008, Masilo Zvidzai was badly beaten and burnt alive by ZANU-PF youths led by Major Moyo. Charles Muzenda was also severely beaten by the National Youth Service graduates who were stationed at Chingami Primary School on 22 October 2002. Stanford Mapuranga was killed at Maranda base and the case was reported (CR 45/6/08) at the police but to date no arrests were made¹⁰.

The former MP for Mwenezi East constituency, Kudakwashe Bhasikiti, after being expelled from ZANU-PF confirmed how ZANU-PF used violence in the post March 29 2008 election. In an interview with the Voice of America, Kudakwashe Bhasikiti said;

*"What happened is that there was full realization that the people had lost confidence in the ZANU-PF leader and then the only way to salvage the disappointment and embarrassment was for him as the commander in chief to command the military to salvage the loss.....members of the opposition had stopped voting, they just went into hiding including their leader, and then, you cannot say there was an election, even the Government of National Unity was not warranted."*¹¹–Bhasikiti (2016).

In this context, the commanding of the military to save ZANU-PF from electoral loss and embarrassment is a confirmation of the violent nature of how campaigning in the

⁸ Bhasikiti Alleged Violent Scandals Exposed: <http://bulawayo24.com/index-id-news-sc-national-byo-79635.html>. Also see: <http://thezimbabwean.co/2010/09/villagers-in-mwenezi-and-zaka-openly-condemn-violence-2/>

⁹ Nehanda Radio (2010) Fifteen year old kills ZANU PF Terror Master. <http://nehandaradio.com/2010/04/27/fifteen-year-old-kills--terror-master/>

¹⁰ Stanford Mapuranga was abducted by Zanu PF militia and found dead on 19 June 2008 in Mwenezi, Masvingo. See: <http://bulawayo24.com/index-id-News-sc-Press%20Release-byo-58845.html>

¹¹ VOA (2016) Bhasikiti Spills the Beans: Mugabe Ordered Army Deployment to Crush the Opposition in 2008 Polls. <http://www.voazimbabwe.com/a/zimbabwe-mugabe-army/3236456.html>

constituency was full of violence. Violent electoral campaigning has been used as tactic to win elections in the past.

4. Nature of Electoral Related Violations Experienced

Some of the violations experienced in Mwenezi East in the past (since 2000) include;

- Assault
- Displacement of people (targeted displacements)
- Occupation of properties (commercial farms)
- Intimidation
- Forced attendance to rallies and night vigils
- Torture (burning with cigarettes, beating with riffle butts and assault on testicles)
- Abductions
- Murder

5. Upcoming Elections: What to look out for!

If the Chimanimani West and Bikita West by-elections are anything to go by, indications are that the upcoming Mwenezi East by-election is likely to be peaceful with little cases of open violence. Intimidation and fear are likely to dominate the political landscape. The same goes along with partisan distribution of food aid. In addition, it is worth noting that violence could be low given that some former ZANU-PF violence architects such as Kudakwashe Bhasikiti and his accomplices moved into the opposition camp (ZimPF). War Veterans are also reducing their support to ZANU-PF which cast possibilities of little war veterans' involvement in the constituency. However, drastic political changes should be anticipated with the rising factionalism in the opposition party Zimbabwe People First, where most expelled ZANU-PF members sought habitation.

Heal Zimbabwe will continue to monitor the constituency's political environment before, during and after the by-election. We also urge would be contesting parties and individuals to consider using peaceful election campaign methods as well as shunning violence, intimidation and other political actions that reduces the electorate's free political choices. We also suggest that known perpetrators of violence must be categorically barred from running for a public office in order to build a culture of peaceful political activism and electoral completion.