



SECURITY COUNCIL REPORT UPDATE REPORT



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ZIMBABWE

Expected Council Action

On 29 April the Council is expected to be briefed by the UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Lynn Pascoe, in private consultations on the situation in Zimbabwe. No formal statement or decision is expected at this stage.

Background

On 29 March elections (Presidential, House of Assembly, Senate and local councils) were held in Zimbabwe. In the House of Assembly the main opposition party, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), won 99 seats. Another opposition faction (which has now committed to an alliance with MDC) won another 10 seats. 97 seats were won by the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF) party. It is the first time, since the country's independence in 1980, that the Zanu-PF party has lost control of the lower house of parliament. In the Senate, Zanu-PF and the combined opposition have won 30 seats each.

Results from the presidential election have not been released four weeks after the elections. Zimbabwe's Electoral Commission (ZEC) has justified this by the need for recounts in 23 constituencies for the parliamentary seats. The MDC claims that its candidate Morgan Tsvangirai won the presidency outright, however others have observed that even though he received most of the votes, Tsvangirai may not have attained the threshold of more than 50% of the votes required to avoid a run-off poll. Zanu-PF also stated that there is likely to be a run-off, as no candidate gained the outright majority.

On 26 April ZEC announced that the results remained unchanged in 18 of 23 constituencies where recounts had taken place. Zanu-PF, therefore, cannot regain its parliamentary majority.

Opposition activists and some international NGOs have said that the prolonged vote recount has been designed to give Zanu-PF adequate time to come to grips with its unexpected political losses.

There are reports that Zanu-PF has incited a campaign of abuses against MDC officials and supporters. On 28 April the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, stated that she was "particularly concerned about reports of threats, intimidation, abuse and violence directed against NGOs, election monitors, human rights defenders and other representatives of civil society". Reports also suggested "an emerging pattern of political violence inflicted mainly, but not exclusively, on rural supporters of the opposition MDC party." She said some reports also indicated some MDC supporters were resorting to violence and intimidation.

On 25 April about 185 to 200 opposition supporters were arrested during a police raid on MDC offices in Harare. The MDC say many of them were taking shelter after fleeing intimidation in rural areas. The MDC says at least 10 of its supporters have been killed, however the police and Zanu-PF deny any deaths due to political violence. On 26 April, a group of churches in the second major city of Bulawayo said it was opening its doors to "shelter the victims of harassment".

On 16 April, at the High-Level debate in the Council on the Peace and Security in Africa, eight members of the Council (i.e. Belgium, Costa Rica, Croatia, France, Italy, Panama, UK and US) expressed concern about the situation in Zimbabwe and called for free and fair elections and the release of the results of the presidential elections.

The UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, held talks with Tsvangirai in Accra (in the margins of the 12th United Nations Conference on Trade and Development meeting) over the protracted post-election crisis in Zimbabwe on 24 April. Ban expressed concern about the post-electoral situation and the prevalence violence and polarization and asked Tsvangirai "to resort to peaceful means to resolve this issue, through dialogue". The Secretary-General said he would consult the leadership of the AU on possible ways forward. Tsvangirai had appealed to the UN and the African Union to intervene because of what he perceived as lack of progress with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) effort.

Options

Options before the Council include:

- an initial informal discussion but not issuing a formal statement at this stage (Individual Council members are likely to voice their positions and concerns to the press after the meeting); and
- deciding to keep the issue under review and to request a further briefing in consultations in the coming weeks;

Council Dynamics

Council members were unanimous in their decision to hold this discussion and request a briefing on the situation in Zimbabwe. The issue will be considered under "other matters" on the Council's agenda during its private consultations. This step does not amount to including Zimbabwe on the Council agenda formally. However reaching consensus on the briefing is an important step. A major tipping point seems to have been when eight of its members made their views known on the situation during the 16 April high level debate.

South Africa had at the beginning of its presidency for the month of April indicated that it considered the situation in Zimbabwe to be a purely national matter and not a matter for discussion in the Council. However with the delay in the announcement of the results of the presidential elections and reports of the violence in the country there seems to have been a change in its stance. South African President Thabo Mbeki has been mediating between the two sides and has expressed preference for "quiet diplomacy." He reiterated his country's commitment to finding closure to the matter during a press conference at the UN on the 16 of April.

The UK and the US have been the most vocal on the issue. The UK's Prime Minister Gordon Brown has expressed concern about "worsening violence" in the country and has said he would increase diplomatic related efforts in the Council. The US has also hinted at the possibility of considering sanctions if the situation remained unchanged and expressed the view that the poll recount exercise is a delay tactic designed to allow Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe intimidate the population and possibly rig a run-off election.

African members of the Council on the other hand, while not objecting to the upcoming briefing, have been generally silent on the issue preferring to defer to the regional initiative of SADC and the attendant mediation effort of South Africa.

The only previous occasion where the Council held a meeting on Zimbabwe in recent years was on 27 July 2005, when it held a private formal meeting to hear a briefing on the humanitarian situation in the country under Rule 48 of its Provisional Rules of Procedure. Although private, the meeting was an official meeting of the Council, as opposed to the unofficial "informal consultations," which are always closed to the wider UN membership. The agenda was approved by the necessary vote of nine members. Brazil abstained and China, Russia, Tanzania, Benin and Algeria opposed the briefing (permanent members enjoy no veto on procedural matters). Although there is no public record of the discussion, a communique was issued. While some saw the humanitarian crisis as a domestic matter which should not be considered to fall within the Council's mandate, nevertheless, a majority of the Council considered that the humanitarian crisis justified hearing the recommendations of the special envoy.