



*Investing in People for Social & Economic Justice*

## **Press Release:**

### **Media Publications on ZIMCODD participation at the SADC People's Summit in Tanzania: Facts of the Matter**

The Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development (ZIMCODD) notes with great concern how the media has continued to peddle malicious lies about the organisation in relation to the SADC People's Summit event held in Tanzania. The continued onslaught and smearing of the organisation in both print and online media have necessitated this press release to share with the public and concerned stakeholders the facts of the matter and setting the record straight regards the agenda of the misconstrued regional event.

#### **What is the SADC People's Summit?**

The SADC People's Summit is an annual gathering of social movements from the SADC member countries that champion social and economic justice. The People's Summit, which is always organised on the side-lines of the SADC Heads of States and Governments, has been convened since 2006. The People's Summit has been held in Lesotho (2006); Zambia (2007); 2008 (South Africa); DRC (2009); Namibia (2010); Angola (2011); Mozambique (2012); Malawi (2013); Zimbabwe (2014); Botswana (2015); Swaziland (2016); Namibia (2018) and Tanzania (2019).

#### **What is the rationale of the SADC People's Summit?**

As the SADC Heads of States and Governments meet to deliberate on broader political, economic, social and governance issues affecting the region, as the name entails, the People's Summit, is designed to create space for people to people solidarity, experience sharing and learning from each other; strengthening civic participation in developmental processes in the region. The People's Summit is not the only side event held on the side-lines of the Summit for Heads of States and Governments. At another level, the NGOs and civil society meet under the auspices of the SADC Council for NGOs. The People's Summit remains an open space for grassroots social movements, community-based organisations, students, youths, women focused advocacy groups, community health advocates, natural resources governance advocates among others. These are people centred groupings that normally endure travelling by bus and trains to meet in this space – as such the People's Summit normally attracts a bigger crowd than other side-line events.

#### **Who is the Convener of the SADC People's Summit?**

The People's Summit is convened by the Southern Africa People's Solidarity Network (SAPSN). SAPSN is a loose network of social movements in Southern African countries. Membership to SAPSN is voluntary and bound by common objectives of pursuit for social and economic justice, people to people solidarity in the region and championing people centred governance policies. Currently SAPSN has member organisations in Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Botswana, Namibia, Madagascar, Tanzania, Angola and DRC. SAPSN is led by a Regional Coordinating Committee (RCC) drawn from the members of the network.

#### **What is the role of Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development (ZIMCODD) in the People's Summit?**

Over the past years, secretariat for the SAPSN has been on a rotational basis, meaning it would move from one country member to another. From January 2019, ZIMCODD was appointed the permanent host secretariat of SAPSN, as such, the organisation shoulders responsibility to organize the network's activities, including but limited to, the People's Summit under the supervision of the Regional Coordinating Committee. In essence, this means that the agenda of the People's Summit is set and approved by the Regional Coordinating Committee, which is the governing body of the network. ZIMCODD as secretariat provides secretariat role of logistical arrangements such as venue, invitations and other logistical issues related to the organising of the People Summit.

### **Who attends the SADC People's Summit?**

As earlier alluded, the People's Summit is a regional event. It is attended by member organisations and their affiliates as well as invited guests. The RCC through the Secretariat announces a public call for registration to participate in the People's Summit and interested participants respond by way of expression of interest to participate and complete registration process ahead of the People's Summit. The 2019 People's Summit registered an attendance of over 700 participants drawn from Malawi, Zambia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Madagascar, Tanzania, Uganda and Mauritius.

### **What has been misconstrued?**

Two things need to be corrected:

- 1) The notion that the SADC People's Summit was an event focused on tarnishing the image of Zimbabwe in Tanzania. ZIMCODD would like to set the record straight, that never at any one point, was demonstrating against or "smearing" the President on the agenda of the 2019 People's Summit. The Programme Agenda of the People's Summit, which has been shared publicly and with security officials, bears testimony to this fact. All deliberations were pitched at regional level and with no specific focus on any particular country.
- 2) The narrative that ZIMCODD under the auspices of SAPSN sponsored Zimbabwean people to go to Tanzania for training in "banditry" and destabilising the country. This allegation is not only malicious but insulting, provocative and reckless putting the lives of the innocent people who participated at the 2019 People's Summit at risk. ZIMCODD would like to bring the following facts to light:
  - that this event was cleared by Tanzania security officials in terms of their legal requirements. This included an undertaking that no demonstrations or public disorder would be done as such activities are not permissible under the country's laws.
  - that prior to entering Tanzania, all delegates names and identity details were submitted to Tanzania Foreign Affairs and Immigration officials for clearance.
  - that the People's Summit was held at the National Museum of Tanzania, a government institution, very close to a police station and less than two kilometres from the State House. In all earnest, for anyone to suggest that people were being trained for "banditry" and political violence in such a setup, is unbelievable.

It is unfortunate and regrettable that journalists who have been authoring malicious stories, particularly Zvamaida Murwira, Darlington Musarurwa and Patience Rusare of Herald, Sunday Mail and the Patriot respectively, never at any point approached or contacted ZIMCODD to get the facts right or at least to here our side of the story.

The Zimbabwean delegation comprised of ZIMCODD secretariat, ZIMCODD members and students. The Zimbabwean delegation was not in any way chosen on basis of their political affiliation. ZIMCODD operates above political party lines in all its programming, we are issue based – our activities at home and abroad are testimony to this effect. The People's Summit was also attended by representatives from funding partners who were clearly stated in the programme that was made a public document before, during and after the event. For the past seven consecutive years, ZIMCODD facilitates the participation of youths – students in tertiary institutions from across the region competing in a debate

and public speaking tournament. These students were not only Zimbabweans, but were drawn from South Africa, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia.

Since inception in 2000, ZIMCODD is and remains a social and economic justice coalition dedicated to facilitating citizens involvement in public policy and advocating for socioeconomic policies that are people centred and pro-poor. The coalition's mandate is to take action in redressing the debt burden, social and economic injustices through formulation and promotion of alternative policies. Much still needs to be done in this arena and as such we opt to remain in our lane and run our course until the debt burden on Zimbabwe reduced to sustainable levels, until the ordinary people are earning a descent livelihood, descent jobs descent health and education among other social and economic justice issues.

It is too far-fetched to try and link ZIMCODD's earnest work to foreign organisations such as Center for Applied Non-Violent Action and Strategies (CANVAS) and it would be prudent for the writer of the Patriot to retract the allegation simply because it is not true and criminalizing innocent citizens of Zimbabwe. ZIMCODD is extremely worried that the narrative perpetuated by the media insinuates that Zimbabwe's national security systems are porous and that we are not secure, something we are not inclined to believe as ZIMCODD. Insinuations about national security are not only detrimental to national development efforts but also undermines public trust in the government's capabilities in safeguarding its citizens.

The misrepresented facts defeat one of the core principles of journalism, which is the principle of "Truth and Accuracy". Truth and Accuracy is lacking in all the stories wherein journalists failed to get the facts right. Among all journalists that wrote about the story, none made efforts to approach ZIMCODD to obtain correct facts or at least our side of the story and this is regrettable.

ZIMCODD would like to emphasise that the SADC People's Summit, that takes place every year on the side-lines of the SADC Heads of State and Government Summit, remains a peaceful platform for SADC citizens to participate in advancing climate, political, social and economic rights of citizens in the region holding the regional bloc accountable to the commitments made in the various protocols. The 2019 People Summit convened in Dar es Salaam is the 13th edition and was held in the same spirit, meant to strengthen regional solidarity and citizens' campaigns for social, environmental and economic justice. During the Summit, issues of climate justice became topical as the continent succumbs to the effects of global warming. The communique shared with SADC Secretariat after the Summit is hereby attached for avoidance of doubt on the agenda of the People's Summit.

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