

Letter to the People of Zimbabwe on the Occasion of our National Heroes Commemorations August 2011

Theme: We are all heroes of our country and our own time.

1. Introduction.

In the thirty one years since our national independence, our country, Zimbabwe, has correctly so, annually remembered citizens who heroically sacrificed not only life and limb but also time, material resources and families in pursuit of freedom from colonial bondage, disenfranchisement and socio-economic injustice. In the commemorations that are occurring in 2011, thirty one years after our national independence, we remain conscious of the truth that national heroism in the political entity that we call Zimbabwe spans across political affiliation and above all, across time.

1.1 Since the first struggles against colonial domination in the late 19th century as realized via the First *Chimurenga*, through to the 1960s-1980 Second *Chimurenga* and to the late 20th century, Zimbabweans have demonstrated a unique resoluteness in pursuit of freedom for all, regardless of the epoch or peculiar

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circumstances. We, as citizens of this great country, have taken to arms, taken to the vote, taken to the streets, taken to Africa and the world with a firm belief that our ideals for a democratic and just society are possible to achieve.

1.3 It is this same purpose and belief that speaks to us today, in the year 2011. It is the same conviction of those that have gone before us, and as sure as the sun rises, the conviction of those that will come after us that guides this, our letter to the people of the Republic of Zimbabwe.

1.4 This letter takes cognizance of the fact that the national debate around heroism, around those that claim hero status for themselves and others, has been imbued with a particular political partisanship that is reflective more of political interests that are neither national nor committed to the attainment of freedom from the bondages of dictatorship, poverty and socio-economic injustice. This is particularly so in relation to the definitions and processes outlined by the three main political parties that comprise the inclusive government on what it is to be a national hero. Contestations by components of the inclusive government as to

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who is a hero are not only more partisan than they are nationalist but betray an unfortunate pre-occupation by our leaders with self over and above country.

1.5 Indeed, no one can self righteously claim to be the most heroic Zimbabwean of all. It is the people of the country that decide so, by way of popular consent and recognition of heroism, be it in politics, the national economy, arts and culture, sport, academia and invention. As such, our annual Heroes Day commemorations should not be about individuals alone, but about the country's passage from bondage, to freedom not only in relation to past or present day politics but in relation to all aspects of what has come to progressively define us as Zimbabwean. In this light the selfless and significant contribution made by the masses should never be downplayed. There are those who provided food, information and even shelter to the comrades, their role should be never be forgotten.

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2. The Challenges of the Country and the Necessity of a New Heroism.

2.1 Fellow citizens, the purpose of this letter is not intended to be about the partisan blame games on the definition of heroes, or heroism as viewed by any of the country's political parties in the inclusive government or any other political party that has since laid claim to fame. This letter is intended to set a new path for all Zimbabweans to begin to view themselves outside of the narrow parameters that are increasingly being set by the political leaders of today.

2.2 There is therefore the necessity of re-thinking and challenging contemporary party narratives of heroes/heroines and heroism, by taking the present circumstances of the country into account. This is because the country, at this moment in our time, stands on the precipice of either remaining true to the intentions of our illustrious history in its pursuit of people centered democracy, social and economic justice as well as a better life for all. Or alternatively departing from these values and embarking on a path that makes it a country that is devoid of an historical understanding of the reasons why it exists.

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2.3 We are aware that there are those that have besieged the state in the name of history and heroism. They have arrogated themselves an historical permanence that conveniently ignores the truth that they have been historical actors in bringing the country to its knees, whether passively or actively. These include components of war veterans, who in pursuing what they have deemed their 'due' for fighting for the liberation of the country, have exhibited unpatriotic amnesia by forgetting that the country does not belong to their generation alone, but also to those that came before them, and those that have arrived after them.

3. Challenging the myth of heroism as embedded in militarism.

3.1 Of late, members of war veterans associations and some members of our armed forces have been declaring that they will defend the sovereignty and independence of our country. This would be a fair point if the country were facing a direct physical threat to its existence from anyone outside or inside of its borders or at its embassies worldwide.

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3.2 As it is, what has emerged in Zimbabwe is increasingly a battle of ideas and not guns, public legitimacy and not legitimacy by coercion. And this should be instructive to those that are laying claim to the gun as the final arbiter of our sovereignty when our country is nowhere near being at war. Where war veterans threaten to go back to the bush, they must be duly informed of the very experience of the liberation struggle and its mantra of the ‘gun must always follow the politics’ and not vice versa.

3.4 In contemporary Zimbabwe, members of the war veterans associations, members of our national defence forces must be reminded, again and again, that it is the ideas, the politics that determine the purpose of the ‘gun’ and not vice versa. Heroism is worthless if it is not tied to democratic ideals; war is useless if it does not intend to establish a democratic and free society.

4. We will all be Zimbabwean heroes/heroines of our time.

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It is the revolutionary Franz Fanon who coined the phrase, *'Each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it, in relative opacity.'* We claim no better disposition to become national heroes, neither do we dismiss the heroism in various spheres of Zimbabweans who may have passed on or remain alive. We are however conscious of the passage of time and the necessity of not repeating history as though time stood still.

4.1 Those that lead us today have continually defined and redefined heroism within specifically narrow precepts and primarily out of contestations for power between each other. We are intent on moving away from this practice and tradition.

4.2 It is therefore imperative that all Zimbabweans begin to look for heroic placement within the context of our time, a time that respects and values the role of our liberation war heroes and leaders but at the same time being a time that is not beholden to a past (recent or older) that is without relevance to democratic principles, values and practice.

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4.3 In urging all Zimbabweans to be heroes of their time we will pursue the democratic path envisioned in the liberation struggle, the social and economic justice agenda that is still outstanding in relation to the livelihoods of the people of Zimbabwe. We will bring the inclusive government, political parties and political actors to account for their actions in relation to the liberation struggles values, the post independence aspirations and the democratic ideals of our society in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War.

4.4 This, the 31st year of our national independence and with it the annual Heroes Day commemorations on August 8th 2011, is a year for all Zimbabweans to begin to challenge those that lead the country and those that insist on imprisoning our national consciousness in their versions of heroism and history. It is time for those that care for our country and its future to depart from the personalized politics that have come to represent the inclusive government and our major political players and start espousing the necessary ideas to make our society a better and democratic one, as has been articulated in the Zimbabwe Peoples Charter, a

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Charter agreed to by over 3500 representative delegates to the 9 February 2008

Peoples Convention, committing all present to the continued pursuit of a
democratic, people-centered and social democratic state.

Ends.

Signed: The Committee of the Peoples Charter (CPC).