



Zimbabwe, today, 18th April, celebrates her 27th anniversary of independence and democracy brought about

through a bitter and protracted war of liberation which cost thousands of lives. During the past 27 years, Zimbabwe has consolidated her political systems, further developed her cultural values and beliefs and firmed up her economic goals and aspirations.

The post-independence period has seen impressive achievements in education, health and economic empowerment of the black majority. In the area of education, Zimbabwe's literacy rate is now 94%, the highest in Africa and certainly one of the highest in the world, chiefly because of government's heavy investment in education over the last 26 years. Where at independence in 1980 primary school enrolment stood at a paltry 800 000 pupils and secondary education was reserved for less than 12% of the population, today there is universal primary and secondary education. Similar investment in tertiary education has seen the number of teacher training colleges rising from 4 in 1980 to 15 at present, while the number of universities offering degree programmes has also increased from 1 to 13 during the same period.

The government has similarly invested in health. At independence in 1980 there were only 4 referral hospitals located in the two major cities of Harare and Bulawayo to service the country's entire population. Of the two hospitals in Harare, one was reserved for whites, while the other served black people. The same situation prevailed in Bulawayo. The government has now built hospitals in each of the 8 provinces and established clinics and health centres in all districts. Now every Zimbabwean is within walking distance of a clinic or health centre.

With respect to economic empowerment of the black

ZIMBABWE AT 27

majority, the government embarked on the land reform programme, which has seen over 220 000 hitherto landless black families being empowered through land distribution. Similar empowerment programmes have been extended to such areas as the financial sector, mining, tourism and the construction industry.

Regrettably, the land reform programme invoked the wrath of the United Kingdom, which mobilized her allies in the European Union and elsewhere to impose sanctions against Zimbabwe. The sanctions, combined with successive years of drought, have wrecked untold suffering on the people of Zimbabwe, especially the most vulnerable such as the elderly, women and children.

The country has now embarked on an economic turnaround programme which requires the support of men and women of goodwill. Zimbabwe boasts of abundant resources and economic potential in agriculture, mining, tourism, manufacturing and services industries, to name but a few. With a highly educated workforce, well developed communications infrastructure, and a vibrant financial sector

GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY

Zimbabwe has established a democratic tradition since it overthrew British colonial rule in 1980. Elections are held whenever they are due and in accordance with the Constitution. Electoral reforms in line with the SADC Guidelines on the Conduct of Free and Fair Elections have seen the introduction of an independent electoral commission, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission that is in

charge of conducting all elections and referenda in Zimbabwe. With a view to expanding democracy, an upper chamber of the House, the Senate has been reintroduced.

Democracy and good governance cannot thrive against a background of poverty and inequality, and the government, through land reform and various black empowerment programmes, seeks to address these issues in a proactive and results-oriented manner.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Zimbabwe is a small but vibrant country, which is not a threat to any other country in the world and which continues to offer great opportunities in many areas. Zimbabwe has, over the years, played important roles in many international fora and in many peace-keeping missions both in Africa and elsewhere. While internationally vilified for the moment, based on disagreement with internal policies and issues, Zimbabwe remains determined to protect that sovereignty.

Zimbabwe has acknowledged the need to build bridges with the international community and is reaching out to those who seek to reaffirm such partnerships with us through mutual respect, equality and closer cooperation.

Canada's commitment to our cause before, during and after our independence is well-documented.

This anniversary provides us with an opportunity to renew and strengthen that relationship and the Embassy of Zimbabwe stands ready to engage in positive and constructive dialogue with all those who wish to learn more about Zimbabwe.

*Florence Zano Chideya (Mrs),
Ambassador*