

**LOVE IN A TIME OF CHOLERA:  
MBEKI'S RELATIONSHIP WITH ROBERT MUGABE (2000 - 2008)**

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*“In his book Diplomacy, Dr Henry Kissinger discusses the place of the issue of human rights in the East-West struggle during the Cold War. He writes that: ‘Reagan and his advisers invoked (human rights) to try to undermine the Soviet system.’ ... It is clear that some within Zimbabwe and elsewhere in the world, including our country, are following the example set by ‘Reagan and his advisers’, to ‘treat human rights as a tool’ for overthrowing the government of Zimbabwe and rebuilding Zimbabwe as they wish. In modern parlance, this is called regime change.” Thabo Mbeki – open letter to the ANC March 2001.*

*Realistically, Zimbabwe will never share the same neighbourhood with the countries of Western Europe and North America, and therefore secure its success on the basis of friendship with these...It may be that, for whatever reason, you [Tsvangirai] consider our region and Continent as being of little consequence for the future of Zimbabwe, believing that others further away, in Western Europe and North America are of greater importance. Thabo Mbeki – letter to Morgan Tsvangirai November, 2008*

The MDC has long been suspicious of any claim by Thabo Mbeki to be an honest broker in the Zimbabwe crisis, having raised concerns in this regard from the moment South Africa showed itself willing to endorse the fraudulent elections of 2000. Recently, calls by the MDC for Mbeki to recuse himself as a facilitator to an accord between the parties have grown louder. Given the track record of the Mbeki administration towards Zimbabwe and Robert Mugabe, the only cause for any surprise is that Mbeki should have been allowed to occupy the position of facilitator at all.

Three clear policy determinations have characterised the Mbeki administration's approach to Zimbabwe:

- a) The policy of “quiet diplomacy”, the hallmark of which was a refusal to condemn human rights abuses and crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Mugabe regime and its supporters, no matter how egregious. In terms of this policy the strongest criticism ever levelled by the Mbeki administration in relation to human rights abuses has been to call on “all parties” to refrain from violence even when there is clear documentation showing that the violence is perpetrated almost exclusively by ZANU PF supporters. This approach reached its most bizarre when the call for “all parties” to refrain from violence was repeated after the MDC leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, along with several supporters, was brutally beaten in

- police custody on 11th March 2007 and images of his injuries and those of others were broadcast around the world.
- b) The policy of blocking any criticism or proposed actions on Zimbabwe in international forums. This policy was articulated in the Mbeki Administration's refrain that Zimbabwean issue must be resolved "by Zimbabweans". (See below for details on this)
  - c) The policy of deflecting pressure for action on Zimbabwe by claiming that talks or negotiations between the contesting parties in Zimbabwe are in progress and nothing should be done while these talks are underway.

An overview of Mbeki and his administration's policies since 2000, illustrate this quite clearly.

In 2000, ZANU PF's complacent hold on power was shaken when a government sponsored new constitution for Zimbabwe was rejected in a February referendum. Given that parliamentary elections were scheduled for June, 2000 and that the Constitutional Referendum had been interpreted more as a vote of no confidence in Mugabe's rule, drastic action was required by ZANU PF if it was to regain its previously unwavering support in rural areas. Widespread invasions of white owned farms began within days, accompanied by extreme state sponsored violence which left many farm workers and white farmers dead, women raped, labourers tortured and hundreds of thousands of workers displaced and rendered jobless. The clear intention was to destroy the support white farmers were providing to the recently formed MDC opposition and to eliminate opposition to ZANU PF emanating from farm labour. As much of the world watched aghast while atrocities took place on the farms, the Mbeki government implemented an economic "rescue package" for the Mugabe regime of close to R1 billion which had been announced a few weeks earlier. The "rescue package" included more than twenty joint investment projects in Zimbabwe, that would benefit ANC supporting Black Economic Empowerment partners and South Africa's state-owned corporations, such as the Development Bank of Southern Africa and the Industrial Development Corporation. Other beneficiaries were South Africa's power and fuel giants ESKOM and SASOL, to whom the Mugabe regime was heavily indebted.

Opinion on Zimbabwe, particularly in relation to the land invasions, became divided along racial lines. Some regarded Mugabe's land policies as representing a genuine attempt to address "one of the enduring legacies of colonialism", namely large-scale white ownership of land at the expense of the black majority. Others, and particularly governments in the West viewed the land invasions as a cynical ploy to maintain power by destroying the base of the opposition. Addressing concerns by the (largely white supported) opposition Democratic Alliance over rights abuses in Zimbabwe Mbeki made clear his position on the issue stating that the "clamour over Zimbabwe reveals [the] continuing racial prejudice in South Africa." He also commented "We are engaging this issue. We are in favour of land redistribution in Zimbabwe. You couldn't sustain a colonial legacy and let it be".

The violence and chaos of the land invasions in the period 2000 – 2002 spilled into the electoral process with endemic and brutal attacks on those opposed to ZANU PF, particularly in areas where opposition support was the strongest. In early May 2000, in the month before the June elections, Mbeki flew to Bulawayo. A photograph taken of Mbeki walking hand-in-hand with Mugabe on arrival was soon to become an all too familiar image of Mbeki and Mugabe together. Mbeki's public displays of affection for Mugabe stand in stark relief to his apparently studied avoidance of opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai. During this visit Mbeki blamed the violence in Zimbabwe on the fact that the land question was still "unresolved." A few weeks later Mbeki travelled to the United States where he declared, despite the continuing rampant violence, that there was no reason to think the elections in Zimbabwe would not be free and fair – "If you stand there a month before the elections and already discredit them, I don't think that is correct".

Despite the widespread and systemic violence and intimidation, the Mbeki government's observer missions for the parliamentary election of 2000 and presidential election of 2002 disingenuously tried to give these elections a clean bill of health. The observer group of 2000 led by now convicted fraudster, Tony Yengeni, pronounced the elections "free and fair" because the two days of voting had been marked by "tranquility", thus quietly and diplomatically ignoring the months of mayhem, oppression and violations of human rights that had preceded the voting. On return to South Africa the report was amended in an attempt to avoid the farcical and "free and fair" was replaced. The result of the election was instead held to be "credible".

A similar approach was taken by Dr. Sam Motsuenyane who headed the South African Government's observer mission for the 2002 presidential election. The report issued by this group announced that "*the authorities charged with conducting the elections discharged their work satisfactorily, except for the decision to reduce the number of polling stations in some urban areas.*" This exception alluded to so diplomatically in the report referred to the deliberate reduction of polling stations in key opposition strongholds which made it physically impossible for an estimated 400 000 voters (the margin by which Mugabe supposedly won the election) to vote in Harare alone. Court orders to extend the voting times were ignored or incompletely applied and voting regulations requiring booths to remain open while persons remained queuing to vote, flouted. Then, utilizing what was to become a common diplomatic technique, the report stated: "*Campaigning was characterised by polarisation, tension and incidents of violence and intimidation. The intention seems to have been to intimidate members of other parties*" thus glossing over the fact that statistics reveal that over 90% of the violence was perpetrated by ZANU PF supporters upon opposition supporters. The report also noted that "The Constitution of Zimbabwe provides for a free press", by-passing the fact that the only independent daily newspaper (*The Daily News*) had been under constant threat and harassment, including the bombing of its presses by government supporters and totally disregarded the fact that the Zimbabwe Government had total and exclusive control over all electronic media - of which it took full advantage to promote ZANU PF. The South African Government's observer group nevertheless announced the elections as "legitimate". Mbeki had also commissioned Judges Khampepe and Moseneke to observe

and report to him on the 2002 elections. The scathing report issued by them was suppressed by Mbeki, leaving the Motsuenyane report as the final South African verdict on the fraudulent election.

The process was repeated for the 2005 elections which did not meet the basic electoral requirements to be considered free and fair. Just prior to those elections, with the connivance of the South African Government, SADC's "Principles and Guidelines on Elections" were hastily put into place in the knowledge and hope that Mugabe would pay lip service to these guidelines. Mugabe duly played the game, introducing largely cosmetic changes to the electoral procedures. Mbeki disingenuously accepted these changes at face value, and despite the fact that the new Electoral Commission comprised a chairperson who was prepared to do the bidding of ZANU PF and a majority of Mugabe appointees and that there had been no significant change to actual pre-election conditions, then stated just before the election: *"Things like an independent electoral commission, things like access to the public media, things like the absence of violence and intimidation - those matters have been addressed ... I have no reason to think that anybody in Zimbabwe will act in a way that will militate against elections being free and fair."*

Mbeki's response to all these fraudulent elections in Zimbabwe was out of kilter with most international observers. The EU roundly condemned the violation of basic electoral standards and imposed travel restrictions on senior ZANU PF officials. The Commonwealth responded by suspending Zimbabwe. Mbeki did everything possible to try to protect Mugabe. Despite having been a part of the three-country committee that recommended suspension, in March 2002 Mbeki criticized the Commonwealth's decision to suspend Zimbabwe. To relieve pressure on Mugabe, Mbeki announced he would be undertaking efforts to facilitate meetings between ZANU-PF and MDC to resolve the Zimbabwe issue. The following month South Africa played a key role in blocking a condemnatory resolution on Zimbabwe at the annual meeting of the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights (UNHRC) – an action repeated in successive years where Mbeki's administration repeatedly introduced motions of "no action" on the situation in Zimbabwe at the UNCHR, effectively stifling debate on the issue. In the same month Mbeki's administration followed up its 2003 "no action" motion by calling for Zimbabwe's reinstatement into the Commonwealth. South Africa then cancelled the Commonwealth review meeting on the issue, which would have meant that Zimbabwe's suspension would have lapsed. In the event, fearing eventual renewed suspension, Mugabe unilaterally withdrew Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth.

The Mbeki Administration's stance at the UNCHR was echoed in other bodies of the United Nations. At the 59<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly's Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural) in 2004, South Africa proposed a no-action vote on the crisis in Zimbabwe. The South African representative criticized what he considered a double-standard whereby country-specific human rights based resolutions were "only drafted to address crises in developing countries" and claimed that this "constituted an affront to the integrity of the African political leadership".

In 2008, the Mbeki administration used its position (and at one stage that of Chair) on the United Nations Security Council to prevent any action on Zimbabwe. In April 2008, South Africa combined forces with China to prevent the Zimbabwe issue from appearing on the Council's agenda and again in June blocked the debate about the country's political situation when it was raised for discussion, demanding that only the humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe be discussed. The stance was defended by South Africa's foreign affairs chief director for UN Issues, Xolisa Mabhongo on the basis that Zimbabwe did not pose a threat to international peace and security. This stance can at best be considered naïve in view of the subsequent xenophobic violence which erupted in South Africa, much of which was directed against Zimbabwean refugees; the recent spread of cholera to South Africa from Zimbabwe on account of a collapsed water and sewage reticulation, and the Zimbabwe government's claims in November 2008 that MDC activists are receiving military training in Botswana for cross border insurgency. South Africa again adopted this stance in lobbying Russia and China to exercise a veto against a resolution put to the Council in July 2008 which would have imposed an arms embargo on Zimbabwe and sanctions on Mugabe and 11 of his supporters. South Africa sought to support its argument by claiming that sanctions were inappropriate at a time that it was facilitating negotiations between ZANU PF and the MDC.

Mbeki's policy of protecting Mugabe in international forums was also apparent during meetings of the African Union meetings. In 2002 the African Union's (AU) Commission on Human and People's Rights undertook a fact finding mission to Zimbabwe to investigate rights abuses there. The Commission found evidence of "political violence... torture... and arbitrary arrest... of opposition members of parliament and human rights lawyers". The report was adopted by the AU in January 2005. In May of that year, Mugabe's government embarked on what it called Operation Murambatsvina. This operation, under the guise of "urban renewal", resulted in the demolition of thousands of homes and the displacement of an estimated 700 000 people, predominantly the urban poor considered politically volatile. Despite the fact that the actions of the Zimbabwean government violated "second generation" rights, such as the right to housing, and not "liberal" rights such as freedom of expression (which Mbeki, like Mugabe, seemed to regard as merely a subterfuge for "regime change"), Mbeki's government remained mute. Stinging criticism, however, came from the UN Special Envoy on Human Settlement Issues whose report roundly condemned the actions of the Zimbabwe Government in relation to the operation.

Despite having undertaken its fact finding mission in 2002, it was only during the 38<sup>th</sup> Session of the AU in 2006, that the African Commission on Human and People's Rights proposed a resolution on the crisis in Zimbabwe, that "[c]ondemns the human rights violations currently being perpetrated [there]", basing the resolution both on its own report on the 2002 mission and the UN Report on Operation Murambatsvina. South Africa immediately stepped up to defend Zimbabwe and prevent discussion of the proposed resolution. Despite the fact that the Zimbabwean government had been in possession of the Commission's report for over two years, South Africa's Foreign Affairs Minister Dlamini Zuma, promptly supported Zimbabwe's [false] claim that it "had not had time to respond" to the Commission's report and supported other spurious procedural

objections to discussion of the resolution. Then Zimbabwean Information Minister Jonathan Moyo's accusation that the opposition Movement for Democratic Change had "smuggled" the report onto the AU agenda at the behest of British Prime Minister Tony Blair, met no objection.

International attempts to isolate Mugabe and his close associates through travel and financial sanctions have been consistently undermined by Mbeki, who has called for the sanctions to be lifted and has done everything possible to eviscerate the effectiveness of the travel ban. This was most prominent during arrangements to convene the EU-ACP (European Union – African Caribbean and Pacific) summits, most recently the attempt by Portugal to do so in December 2007. South Africa supported the call by African states to boycott the summit, as it had done successfully during the aborted 2003 summit, unless Mugabe was permitted to attend. In the same year, in the face of EU objections, Francis Nhema, Zimbabwe's Environment and Tourism Minister was nominated for a post on a United Nations Commission, a nomination, in view of Zimbabwe's economic collapse, that was ironic, being that of the chair of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development. Zimbabwe's UN Ambassador responded to the EU objections by asking: "What has sustainable development got to do with human rights?" South Africa supported the eventually successful nomination.

South African intelligence services and defence forces maintained a close relationship with their Zimbabwean counterparts during Mbeki's presidency. In June 2006 Zimbabweans were treated to footage of South Africa's Minister of Intelligence Ronnie Kasrils hugging Zimbabwean State Security Minister Didymus Mutasa during a visit to Zimbabwe to discuss undisclosed issues. But weeks before the meeting, Mutasa had been directly implicated in intra party violence in his home area of Rusape.

Since 2004, armaments to the value of more than \$237 401 (R3,3-million) were privately transferred from South Africa to Zimbabwe. The trade records show that in 2004 South Africa exported about 2,6 tonnes of revolvers, another 2,5 tonnes of other firearms, between 4 and 7,5 tonnes of cartridges and what appear to be parts for military vehicles. All of this equipment was vital for the continuance of Mugabe's repression of the opposition by members of the army and police. The South African defence department donated Dakota aircraft engines worth millions to Zimbabwe, while South Africa's Armscor transferred spares to get Zimbabwean military helicopters airborne. Zimbabwean soldiers and flying instructors have been trained by the South African Defence Force and the South African Air Force. The flow of arms to Zimbabwe required approval by the South African government's National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC), headed by Sydney Mufamadi, (subsequently appointed by Mbeki as a key figure in the negotiations between ZANU PF and the MDC). The extent of the supply of arms to Zimbabwe from South Africa was highlighted in April 2008 when Armscor was contracted to transport weaponry destined for Zimbabwe and carried by Chinese freighter, the An Yue Jiang, from Durban port to Harare. The arms were due to arrive in Zimbabwe as the Mugabe regime was putting into place arrangements, coordinated by select members of the military, for a bloody suppression of the electorate to ensure "victory" in the presidential run off election. NCACC policy prohibits the flow of arms from South Africa to conflict zones. Despite this policy Mbeki and Mufamadi

insisted that the delivery be allowed. Only action by human rights NGOs in South Africa stopped the consignment from arriving in Zimbabwe.

Throughout the 2000 to 2008 period, Mbeki has sought to deflect criticism from his policy. In October 2006, following what was believed to be an ANC directive, the South African Government-owned SABC banned critics of Mugabe and Mbeki's Zimbabwe policy from SABC, including President Mbeki's brother, Zimbabwean Archbishop Ncube, Mail & Guardian owner Trevor Ncube, and Eleanor Sisulu. Editorial policy, marked by a fawning interview with Mugabe by the SABC head Snuki Sikalala, gave support to Mugabe and Mbeki's policies. In addition Mbeki deflected criticism by a refrain that negotiations "are in progress" between the MDC and ZANU PF and that he was engaged in dialogue with Mugabe. The manner in which these assurances were expressed to Mbeki's ANC party did not inspire confidence. Addressing the ANC's 51st National Conference in 2002 he declared: "We are ready to engage both our ally and fellow liberation movement, ZANU-PF, and all others concerned, to help resolve the various issues in a constructive manner". This partisanship in relation to Mugabe was recently repeated in October, 2008 in a letter to the new President of the ANC, Jacob Zuma, where Mbeki sought to justify his policies while in office. In that letter he refers to Robert Mugabe as one of several leaders with whom he has been "privileged to interact" and who is one of the "titans" who "were and are the true heroines and heroes of our struggle".

As mentioned above, the claim that negotiations were in progress played a key role in defeating a UN Security Council resolution for sanctions upon Mugabe and 11 of his close associates. Having initially suggested that they would vote with the other countries which held a veto power, Russia and China vetoed the resolution after lobbying by South Africa. This is but one of numerous instances where Mbeki used the excuse of negotiations to defer action on Zimbabwe, the ruse being deployed whenever pressure was increased on either himself or Mugabe in relation to the Zimbabwe crisis. To cite but a few of many examples - at the World Economic Forum in Durban in June, 2003 President Mbeki predicted that a solution to the crisis in Zimbabwe would be found within a year. And in July 2003, when George Bush visited South Africa and the press speculated that Bush would use the occasion to apply pressure on Mbeki to resolve the Zimbabwe issue, Mbeki claimed: "We have urged the government and the opposition to get together. They are indeed discussing all issues. That process is going on". This was despite strong denials from the MDC that any such dialogue was in fact in progress. Undeterred and foreclosing debate on Zimbabwe, Mbeki reportedly gave Bush an assurance that Mugabe would leave office by December that year.

This, then, is the backdrop to the events of 2008 when Mbeki's role as a mediator became that much more significant.

One of the few positive results that emerged from Mbeki's interaction with Mugabe appears to have been to persuade Mugabe that a way out of the isolation of his regime was to hold elections which had a semblance of compliance with democratic norms. However, even this positive development is not untainted. In late 2007 Mbeki persuaded the MDC to accept a constitutional change, which was a key part of Mugabe's strategy

and one which allowed Parliament to appoint a new president pending elections if the incumbent (i.e. Mugabe) left office for any reason. Mbeki assured the MDC that the quid quo pro would be an easing of repressive laws affecting elections. When Mugabe never delivered on this undertaking, Mbeki did nothing.

Having won a two thirds majority in parliament in 2005, both Mbeki and Mugabe believed that Mugabe could secure a victory in the March 2008 elections without engaging in the violence which had characterized the 2000 and 2002 elections or fully utilising the unrepealed and repressive laws which ought to have been amended as part of the quid quo pro. Both were mistaken. Although the March 2008 “harmonized” elections (where the Presidential, Senate, House of Assembly and Local Government elections were held simultaneously) were a long way from fair (due the ZANU PF’s manipulation of the voters’ roll, control over the electronic and printed media and use of state resources, particularly food handouts, for party political purposes), they were certainly the most free elections since the crisis began. The combined MDCs took 109 of 210 House of Assembly seats against ZANU PF’s 97. The elected seats in the Senate split 50:50. Although the results of all elections were known within 48 hours of the poll, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), eked out the results and announced them as if dealing a pack of cards, with one seat declared won by the MDC, the next by ZANU PF.

The results of the presidential election, however, were withheld. The obvious reason was that Mugabe had lost the poll. The Zambian president, as then chair of SADC, convened an emergency summit to discuss the refusal of ZEC to declare the presidential result.

Mbeki swung into action to rescue Mugabe from his defeat. He travelled to Zimbabwe on the way to the emergency summit, meeting Mugabe with the usual hugging and hand holding. After a short meeting with Mugabe, Mbeki addressed reporters on the failure to release the results of the presidential poll, stating that the delay was part of the “normal electoral process in terms of the law of Zimbabwe”, when it clearly was not, and infamously stated that he would not describe the situation “as a crisis”.

Mugabe decided that it would be politic not to attend the emergency SADC meeting. However, his input was reportedly delivered by Mbeki, apparently causing Zambia president Levy Mwanawasa to remark that “If Robert Mugabe has anything to say to me as chairperson, then he can talk to me himself.” He added that Mbeki was creating the impression that he was becoming “Mugabe’s messenger”. In addition, Mbeki sought to prevent Tsvangirai from addressing the SADC meeting, but was overruled by Mwanawasa.

When the results of the presidential poll were finally released in May, the poll gave 1 195 562 votes (47.9%) to Morgan Tsvangirai, 1 079 730 votes (43.2%) to Robert Mugabe, 207 470 votes (8.3%) to Simba Makoni and 14 503 votes (0.6%) to Langton Towungana. The lengthy delay in releasing the results lent credence to the notion that the results had been manipulated to reduce Tsvangirai’s poll to below the 50% plus one necessary to prevent a run off. The run off itself, which should have been held “within 21 days of the previous election”, was delayed by ZEC to 27th June, 2008. Mugabe used the hiatus to

mobilise the military and militia. The action mirrored Mugabe's response to the referendum defeat of 2000, referred to at the outset, though it surpassed that response in the degree and extent of violence meted out to MDC supporters and perceived supporters. The brutal military crackdown on the opposition was euphemistically referred to as Operation Mavhoterapapi (Where you put your 'X' or how did you vote.) It is during this period that Mbeki sought to allow the arms shipment carried by the An Jue Jiang to be delivered to Zimbabwe. It is not as though Mbeki was unaware of the violence. He had dispatched a team of Generals from the SANDF to report on the situation in Zimbabwe. The team apparently detailed the extent of the violence in a graphic fashion. Like the Khampepe report before it, this report was never made public by Mbeki. The extent of the violence rendered participation in the election by Tsvangirai and observation of the process, impossible. Without any real monitoring taking place, ZANU PF was left to present whatever results it wanted for the one man election. It did not miss the opportunity, claiming an 85% "victory" for Mugabe, with a slightly increased voter turn out from the first election, despite the boycott by the MDC. The extent of the electoral farce precluded even the usually sympathetic election observers who had been allowed in by ZANU PF, from endorsing the election. They unanimously pronounced that the election did not reflect the will of the people.

Mugabe, however, had himself sworn in as president a few hours before the results had been officially announced and within hours jetted off to an AU summit in Cairo. Two weeks later he attended a SADC meeting. At both these forums he was invited and attended as "President of Zimbabwe" despite the universal rejection of the election. However, Botswana unequivocally refused to recognise Mugabe's presidency, and other SADC states, including even South Africa, prevaricated on the issue. The correct course of action would have been for SADC to refuse to recognise the obviously fraudulent result and to demand a fresh election, independently supervised. Instead, Mbeki moved quickly to help Mugabe out of his "legitimacy crisis". While the MDC proposed a transitional government leading to fresh elections, Mbeki quickly doused any such aspirations. After protracted negotiations, the MDC leadership, under extensive pressure from Mbeki, agreed to a government of national unity.

Most significantly, the unity agreement recognised Mugabe as president of Zimbabwe with immediate effect and agreed that he would "continue" to hold office. Mbeki had thus, for the moment at least, resolved Mugabe's legitimacy crisis.

The agreement left Mugabe's powers largely unfettered and intact, though under a restructured form of government. The implementation of this restructuring was to require further and extended negotiations. In particular, Tsvangirai's appointment as Prime Minister under the agreement (with singularly amorphous powers) was to come later, depended on Mugabe's discretion (which he has so far declined to exercise) and relied on a constitutional amendment (which would have to be approved by ZANU PF) before this post had any status in law. During this period Mugabe has used every opportunity to flaunt his "re-election" and recognition on the international stage, while humiliating Tsvangirai by refusing to allow his passport to be renewed.

Given Mbeki's support for Mugabe up to the signing of the agreement on the 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2008, it is not surprising that the agreement sought to restore Mugabe legitimacy, left Mugabe in full control and admits little hope for the return of the rule of law and democracy in Zimbabwe. As such, the agreement affords little benefit to the people of Zimbabwe. It has, however, silenced the MDC and the clamour for fresh and free and fair elections in Zimbabwe. Once again the ploy of negotiations has rescued Mugabe - and from his most severe test yet. The only mystery to be solved is why the MDC has permitted Mbeki the space to do this.

However, disputes over Mbeki's role in the negotiations in late November 2008, and in particular in the dispute over the allocation of Ministries, indicates that the MDC has finally realised that Mbeki is probably the most unsuitable leader within SADC to claim the position of an honest broker between ZANU PF and the MDC. The MDC has now demanded the removal of Mbeki in the strongest terms, and as the above indicates, quite rightly so.