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# IPRIS Viewpoints

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## Zimbabwe looking back on the Lusaka Protocol

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Since the signing of the power-sharing agreements in Zimbabwe in 2008, the country has been run by a type of government especially designed to promote unity and national reconciliation, while avoiding conflict. The root of this conflict resolution measure can be traced back several years, when Zimbabwe began spiraling into economic recession, health crises and extreme hunger cases. This grave humanitarian situation along with the government's flawed and dangerous distribution of land – which eventually merited EU and US sanctions – reflected on the presidential and parliamentary results of the 2008 elections. Yet, democratic change was not registered. Although Morgan Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T) reportedly won both elections, Robert Mugabe's vote recounting scheme enabled a reinterpretation of results, a process which ended with South African mediation and the decision to create a government of unity and national reconciliation. However, with the imminent failure of this power-sharing agreement between the two rival parties on the horizon, opposition leader and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai traveled to Luanda on the April 11<sup>th</sup> to meet with Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos, the next leader of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), to discuss issues mainly related to Zimbabwe's upcoming elections. Since SADC has a preponderant role in the electoral matters of its member states, it is clear that

by taking the SADC presidency in August, Angola will have to mediate and make arrangements regarding the Zimbabwean elections. Yet, both power-sharing agreements and their consequences are not unfamiliar scenarios for most Angolans. When the Lusaka Protocol was signed between UNITA and the MPLA government in 1994, it implemented a wide range of considerations and policies that would eventually create a government of union and national reconciliation, not much different from the current one in Zimbabwe.

The Lusaka Protocol foresaw an unprecedented integration of the political and military apparatus of the different forces in play in Angola. Large numbers of UNITA troops would demobilize, several hundred would join the Angolan police and military, UNITA's generals would become officers in the Angolan Armed Forces, headquarters and political positions at the government would be given to UNITA members. This transition entailed a complete switch from military struggle to democratic political dealings, under the direct supervision of the UN and the troika – comprising Portugal, the US and Russia. However, the protocol assumed from the beginning that both sides of the Angolan conflict desired peace, a careless analysis of the realities that would serve to reignite civil war. The fact that, since 1994, UNITA had been suffering choking sanctions imposed by international actors has led many on the MPLA side



to become disillusioned with the Lusaka Protocol, due to the high level representation given to UNITA in the government when compared to its military successes on the battlefield. Indeed, the government's military victories did not mirror the attribution of such high political responsibilities to the UNITA. Distrust, along with a poorly equipped and designed UN mandate would then trigger the continuation of the Angolan conflict.

In comparison, and although Zimbabwe is not experiencing conflict with the same proportions and historical background as Angola's, on the international and political prism, results might be fairly similar and dire for Zimbabweans.

Firstly, it should not be assumed that the Mugabe entourage wishes to liberalize or open the regime to a proper democratic order. Since there is no UN mission or troika of influential countries, the Zimbabwean opposition is left isolated, counting only on the meager support of the AU and the SADC. Hence, the lack of supervision of the power-sharing agreement or of future elections might enable Robert Mugabe to maintain the current status quo in the absence of organized international pressure. However, even when Angola was the center of attentions and foreign pressure was in place, the government of unity and national reconciliation still failed and gave way to open conflict. Foreign supervision and the imposition of agreement clauses and policies can never erase the reasons for the conflict itself. In the end, with or without international supervision, the very nature of the conflict and of the unity government will print an overriding conception defined by a lingering power struggle, which aside from favoring any of the opposing parties will certainly not promote peace and political stability. So it was in Angola, and so might it be in Zimbabwe.

Secondly, either the power-sharing agreement is resurrected and given renewed momentum, or the next elections could trigger more violent methods of political battle, if Robert Mugabe retains his solid hold on power. With the failure of the Lusaka Protocol, the Angolan civil

war was presumed never to stop until a clear winner emerged. In Zimbabwe, if the political scene of the post unity government evolves negatively, it may very well end with a similar result to Angola's – with a clear winner and a potentially broken country.

It appears that power-sharing agreements might work if both parties are in equilibrium regarding their political and military forces. However, this type of agreement has rarely managed to stop conflict and create a lasting peace. As the history of Angola informs, a return to political conflict or the beginning of some type of armed struggle might be a plausible scenario for Zimbabwe until one of the forces triumphs over the other. The pieces seem to be in place, since Robert Mugabe currently holds more power in Zimbabwe's political structure than Morgan Tsvangirai.

SADC will have an important role to play both in Zimbabwe's electoral process and in the period that concludes any type of government. Going through a severe humanitarian crisis, with little support from the international community, it will fall upon SADC's shoulders to solve the dire issues of Zimbabwe. Perhaps the Angolan government's experience will evoke a better understanding of the nature of this political conflict, yet history has always tested the strength of a new unity government after the failure of a previous one.

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