

International Day of Peace

Reflections on the Second Republic's Commitment to Unity and Peace

Joseph Mashingaidze

The world commemorates the International Day of Peace (IDP) on the 21st of September 2022. This is an annual commemoration on the United Nations calendar, dedicated towards promoting non-violence and for everyone around the globe to commit to peace, unity and harmony within and among states. The United Nations' theme for this year is, 'End Racism; Build Peace.' As the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres puts it, racism and discrimination continue to poison institutions, social structures and everyday life, denying people their fundamental rights and destabilising societies thus triggering conflicts and disunity. Cognisant that discrimination abounds in society, the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) celebrates this year's International Day of Peace under a customized theme, 'Promote Inclusivity; Build Peace'. A key point of reflection for this year's IDP are the strides made by the Second Republic, led by His Excellency President E.D. Mnangagwa in the facilitation and promotion of inclusive peace and unity.

Operationalising the NPRC

The Second Republic inherited a process in which the passing of the NPRC Act had become a holdup, with the first draft bill having suffered a lot of criticism, something which threatened the promulgation of this critical law to kickstart national peacebuilding work. However, President Mnangagwa made this a priority of the Second Republic, demonstrating his desire for the country to chart a new path of unity and peace. In his inauguration speech in November 2017, the Head of State said, '... we stand apart as a unique nation driven by impulses of tolerance, peace and unity which we have displayed notwithstanding our diverse political persuasions... that peace and harmony should be characteristic of how we relate to one another.' Soon thereafter, President Mnangagwa signed into law the NPRC Act on the 5th of January 2018, opening the avenue for the Commission to embark on a journey of rallying Zimbabweans for national cohesion, healing and reconciliation. This, he reiterated when he spoke with the New York Times in March 2018; 'The creation of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission which I signed into law will enable us to move forward now as one united people... Whatever misunderstandings we may have had in the past, let these make way for a new beginning.'

Peace: A Development Issue

The Second Republic has been unequivocal about its acknowledgment that Zimbabwe can only develop when we are at peace and in harmony with one another. Addressing the United Nations General Assembly in September 2018, President Mnangagwa affirmed that, 'Peace, security, stability, democracy and good governance are essential ingredients for sustainable development.' This is aptly reflected in the two economic development policies of the Second Republic, the Transitional Stabilization Program (TSP) and the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS 1). Both policies acknowledge that in order to become an upper middle-income economy by 2030, National Cohesion is a necessary condition for a peaceful and developing new Zimbabwe (TSP). It is also recognized that Zimbabwe has had a conflictual past; and the Government is resolved to supporting programs to achieve improved social cohesion (NDS 1). This entails departure from past omissions and commissions and directing efforts towards peaceful co-existence of various segments of the society, including people of diverse political views.

A Call to Dialogue

The magnanimity of the Second Republic is exemplified in its call to Zimbabweans from all angles to bury their differences and work towards mutually beneficial dialogue. Writing on his Twitter page in January 2019, President Mnangagwa had this to say, 'I invite leaders of all political parties to come together. What unites us is stronger than what could ever divide us. Let's begin a national dialogue. Let's put the economy first. Let's put the people first.' This call culminated in the coming together of most of the 2018 Presidential candidates under the Political Actors Dialogue Platform to find each other in contributing to the development needs of the country. At the POLAD Economic Summit in February 2020, the President reiterated that, 'The cornerstone of the Second Republic is dialogue as a means of resolving challenges that may arise in our nation and the sharing of knowledge among

us as Zimbabweans... It is only through dialogue and hard honest work that our collective efforts can be fruitful.' It is recognized that other players have not taken up this offer to dialogue, but the Second Republic has remained open to embracing everyone to embrace each other for the good of the nation. In his Unity Day message in December 2020, the President reminded the nation of the virtues of dialogue, 'Nothing beats sitting down as one people to iron out any differences that exist or might arise. Peace in our nation remains the foremost prize for which no price is too big to pay, no cause or ego is too big to bend.'

The Exhortation to Non-Violence

The Second Republic continues to make a strong appeal to Zimbabweans to shun violence as a means to achieving political ends. A few incidents of violence have been witnessed since 2017, notably in August 2018 and January 2019. His Excellency, President Mnangagwa has been bold enough to accept these unfortunate events, resulting in him commissioning an inquiry to investigate the former; which it did and came up with recommendations. In his message at the official opening of the First Session of the 9th Parliament, the President said, 'The isolated, regrettable and unacceptable incident of violence which occurred on the 1st of August 2018 should not deter us from the bold course of peace we have begun.' His has been an unrelenting call that violence has no place in our society and should be shunned by every progressive Zimbabwean. In January 2019, President Mnangagwa made another impassioned plea for peace, 'I call for calm and peace from all our brothers and sisters. We are one nation, with one mission and we will realise it together... there can be no justification for violence against people and property. Violence will not reform our economy. Violence will not build our nation.' He also warned against the influence of outsiders who may instigate violence in communities and they end up joining unwillingly. In June 2022, the Head of State and Government cautioned Zimbabweans, 'Keep your eyes and ears open. Do not allow outsiders from your communities to come and disturb the peace and harmony in your areas. Violence has no place in the Zimbabwe we are building. We want peace, peace, peace, love and harmony.'

Rallying the Church for Unity and Peace

It has not escaped the Second Republic that religion plays a role in unifying the nation. President Mnangagwa has interfaced with the church either during national days of prayer or at their festival gatherings; repeating the message of unity, peace, love and harmony. At a National Thanksgiving and Dedication service in December 2021, he advised; 'We love our neighbour as ourselves because this is after all the greatest commandment. Let 2022 be about greater, greater peace; stronger unity and great hard work. Speaking at Easter, 2022, the President said, 'As the name of the church suggests, let us forever remain united as one big family within both the church and the nation at large. For it is good and pleasant that we live in unity, and results in God bestowing His blessings- Psalms 133 v 123.' While urging the nation to take a leaf from the church in promoting love and unity, he also urged the church to pray for peaceful elections in 2023. In July 2022, the President asked that, 'The church should preach peace and calmness in our communities and our nation so that our elections take place in an environment of non-violence and tolerance.' Confirming how the Second Republic has been resolute towards preaching peace everywhere, President Mnangagwa in May 2018 said; 'Thank you Zimbabwe! Wherever I go, I preach the gospel of unity, I preach the gospel of love, I always urge Zimbabweans to unite, to live in harmony ... Have you ever heard that I preach the gospel of hatred? I want to continue to preach love and unity and to encourage Zimbabweans to live in harmony.' Indeed, in one of his spiritual messages in January 2020, the President quoted the book of Mathew and said, 'It is not in our Zimbabwean culture to be violent, to hate and to do evil to one another. Instead, as Christ has taught us in Matthew 5 verse 9, let us be peacekeepers.'

Uniting the Nation Amidst the Despair of Covid-19

The past three years have taken a heavy toll on the nation, with the ravaging Covid-19 health emergency causing untold grief among many households. Over 5000 people have now lost their lives while tens of thousands at one point got moribund and bedridden due to the disease. Many have recovered, thanks to the sterling work of the Second Republic for running effective treatment, palliative care and vaccination programs. The unavoidable lockdowns became a potential conflict multiplier as many scrounged around for scarce commodities and services. Amidst these depressing times, the Second Republic was unrelenting in its hope for a better future for Zimbabweans and continued to urge for the unity of the country to beat the deadly virus. In one of his addresses

to the nation at the peak of Covid-19 in July 2020, President Mnangagwa said, 'Together in unity, love and shared sense of responsibility, we shall overcome and save ourselves, our families and our nation.' The message was repeated in a similar address in October 2020, 'Let us together cultivate a society of hope, and not despair; of inspiration instead of desperation. Unity in place of disunity, love in place of hate, and peace instead of disharmony and instability.'

Targeted Messages of Peace and Non-Violence

The Second Republic's messages have reached out to key populations in Zimbabwe with the reverberating call for unity, tolerance and inclusivity. The youths were urged by President Mnangagwa to desist from violent conduct in June 2022 when he said, 'Rambai kushandiswa kuita violence. Parents and guardians, please guide your youths accordingly. Violence does not pay.' Recognising women as paragons of peace, the President in June 2022 again said, 'As government and the party, we recognize that women are peace builders. It is important, therefore, that women be put in positions of responsibility, in both the public and private sectors across the political divide. You may say no to violence and come out preaching unity, peace, love and harmony in our country.' The President has also encouraged traditional leaders to support his call for peace and unity. In May 2018, he had this to say, 'In the same line, I would like to address traditional leaders to promote unity and harmony in their areas of responsibility.' Media practitioners were equally advised '... to resist the temptation to be a vehicle for sowing seeds of division and despondency amongst the citizenry' in a statement promoting national dialogue in May 2019. Lastly, unity among Zimbabwean workers was urged, with promises to lend an ear to the grievances of workers for peace, harmony and productivity to prevail in workplaces. In his 2022 May Day address, the President noted that, 'The workplace should be a place of harmony and fulfilment...it is encouraging that the leadership of the labour movement now values the utility of social dialogue... as a listening President, my door remains open for more engagements.'

Hope for a Future of Unity, Peace, Love and Harmony

As the nation commemorates the 2022 International Day of Peace, the echoing call is for everyone from all spheres of our society; men, women, youth, boys, girls, people with disabilities, religious, racial and tribal groups; and for leaders across the spectrum of fields in Zimbabwe; to put their heads together in calling for inclusivity and the building of a peaceful and harmonious Zimbabwe. The Second Republic has demonstrated this commitment to walk with Zimbabweans on this path of peace. In his 2020 Heroes Day message, the President urged us to emulate the heroes of our struggle; 'Like the heroes of yester-year, today we have no alternative; we must as Zimbabweans close ranks by uniting, in peace, harmony and with resolute patriotism and self-love to chart a brighter future for ourselves and for the sake of our motherland.' Achieving a middle-income economy by 2030 should take a conscious effort to build a united and cohesive country as an important precondition for development. This desire is unmistakable in President Mnangagwa's parting call made at his State of the Nation address in August 2020; 'The direction we desire remains unchanged. Our goal remains clear and stable. Forward ever! This is the goal of peace, unity, stability, development, progress and prosperity.' A peaceful Zimbabwe for all generations is possible.

Peace begins with me, peace begins with you, peace begins with all of us