

## **Why ZAPU entered into the Unity accord of December 1987**

Zimbabweans seem to have developed amnesia over the real reasons why ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People's Union) entered into the unity accord of 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1987. ZAPU was the main nationalistic party that waged the war of liberation against the Rhodesian racist colonial regime. It was formed in 1961 with Joshua Nkomo as its founding president. Its armed wing was called Zipra (Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army). In 1963 a splinter group comprising of Robert Mugabe and others broke away and formed ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union). Its armed wing was ZANLA (Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army). Since the split of 1963, the two parties did not trust each. They however remained committed to the armed struggle as they were fighting a common enemy, Ian Smith and his Rhodesia front.

Following the Lancaster negotiations of 1979 and the subsequent independence that was ushered by these negotiations the two parties agreed to merge the two armed wings, ZIPRA and ZANLA. The 1980 elections gave ZANU the majority of seats in Parliament and Robert Mugabe became Prime minister. However the distrust between the two parties remained with Robert Mugabe accusing Joshua Nkomo and his party of having hidden agendas and hiding weapons in order to overthrow Mugabe's government. The distrust amongst the two parties was worse between the armed wings, ZIPRA and ZANLA. This made integration of the two armed wings a monumental task.

The cold war that existed between the two parties ignited into conflict in 1980 following an utterance by Enos Nkala, who was now the Minister of Finance under ZANU. At a rally in Bulawayo Enos Nkala said something to the effect that ZANU will deliver a few blows to ZAPU if they did not behave themselves. This triggered fighting between ZIPRA and ZANLA forces. The fighting lasted for several days. It has come to be known in the history books as "The Entumbane uprising". A year later another fight broke out in the Midlands near Connemara prison. This was thwarted with the help of the Rhodesian forces. The Government asked the former Chief Justice of Zimbabwe, Enoch Dumbutshena to hold an inquiry as to the source of the fighting. To date that report has never been made public.

After Entumbane there was very little appetite by ZIPRA forces for joining the new integrated army. There were reports of mysterious disappearances and issues of favoritism in the allocation of senior positions in the new integrated army. ZIPRA cadres deserted and most took their weapons with them. The situation became worse after the alleged finding of weapons in February 1982 at a farm owned by ZAPU. There were accusations and counter accusations from both sides. ZANU accused ZAPU of trying to overthrow the government by force. This led to the arrest of ZAPU leaders that included Dumiso Dabengwa and Lookout Masuku and four others. They were charged with treason, but the government failed to prove a case against them. Upon their release Dumiso Dabengwa and Lookout Masuku were re-detained without trial for four years. Joshua Nkomo temporarily fled into exile in the United Kingdom. This caused a lot of discontent within the ranks and file of former ZIPRA fighters who deserted the army in large numbers. With their leaders all locked up or in exile, they felt there was nobody to protect them within the army.

Following an attempt on the Prime Minister Robert Mugabe's life and abductions of Tourist by disgruntled ex-ZIPRA combatants, the government adapted a militant approach towards ZAPU. Robert Mugabe had earlier on signed an agreement with the North Koreans in 1980 to train a militia that would "combat malcontents". Joshua Nkomo expressed his reservations over this combat unit in any interview with a London based television station. (The interview is readily available on YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J8wUhc91qxc323>)

The militia came to be known as the fifth brigade. The men were drawn from ex-ZANLA forces. The first commander of this brigade was Perence Shiri. This combat unit was different from the regular army in that it reported directly to the Prime Minister. Their most distinguishing feature in the field was their red berets.

They were sent into the Midlands and Matabeleland to "restore order". Their mandate was a clear slate and they killed civilians with impunity. Most of the dead were shot in public executions, often after being forced to dig their own graves in front of family and fellow villagers. Another way the fifth Brigade used to kill large groups of people was to burn them alive in huts. They did this in Tsholotsho and also in Lupane. They would routinely round up dozens, or even hundreds, of civilians and march them at gun point to a central place, like a school or bore-hole. There they would be forced to sing Shona songs praising ZANU, at the same time being beaten with sticks. These gatherings usually ended with public executions. Those killed could be ex-ZIPRA, or ZAPU officials, or anybody chosen at random. The Zimbabwe government repudiated these allegations and accused the hostile foreign press of fabricating stories. Ex-ZIPRA combatants retaliated and murdered those they regarded as "sell-outs".

At this point Zimbabwe was literally turning into another Rwanda. It was not until the intervention of leaders like Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia. Robert Mugabe and ZAPU leader Joshua Nkomo signed the Unity Accord on December 22, 1987. The Unity accord was a political decision made by ZAPU in order to put to an end to the killings that were taking place in the Midlands and Matabeleland. For all terms and purposes ZAPU sacrificed itself to put to an end the killings that came to be known as Gukurahundi. If ZAPU had not agreed to this unity accord, the killings would have possibly surpassed the genocide that took place in Rwanda. On 18 April 1988, Mugabe announced an amnesty for all ex-ZIPRA combatants, and Joshua Nkomo in turn called on them to lay down their arms. A general ordinance was issued saying all those who surrendered before 31 May would get a full amnesty. This was extended not just to ex-ZIPRA combatants, but to criminals of various types serving jail terms and all members of the security forces who had committed human rights violations. By the 1990s the disturbances were finally at an end. This brought relief nation-wide, but in parts of the country it had left behind many problems that remain unsolved to this day. These include poor health, poverty, practical and legal problems, hence the revival of ZAPU in November 2008. Innocent civilians lost leg and limb in the ensuing massacres. Property belonging to civilians was destroyed and

to this day the effects of the massacres that came to be known as the Gukurahundi have transcended generations.

Lloyd Msipa writes from London, UK and can be contacted at [lmsipalaw@gmail.com](mailto:lmsipalaw@gmail.com)

*Acknowledgement- Some of the material here is drawn from a report compiled by the Legal Resources Foundation (LRF) and the Catholic commission for justice and peace in Zimbabwe (CJP) entitled Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace. A report on the disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands 1980–1989.*