

About

A STATEMENT FROM CONT MHLANGA

Voices For Change

Amakhosi Theater. Bulawayo. Zimbabwe.

Tuesday, September 04, 2007 Today I am very pleased to bring to your attention very positive new developments taking shape in Zimbabwe. A few months before the next combined Parliamentary and Presidential elections some artists in Zimbabwe and their friends across the world have launched a new non-political movement called Voices For Change (VFC). This is a fast growing movement that supports creative artists from all disciplines to produce, perform, distribute and amplify the voices of the majority who live in Difficult Times while exposing the trickery and hypocrisy of the minority who live in Good Times while they claim to be acting on behalf of the people and the country by taking such critical and sometimes protest works to the people by all means available and possible.

Why a movement of Voices? To break two conditions and situations that are currently on the rise in the country and more so as the 2008 election days get closer. The two are: (1) Fear and (2) Access to Mass Media. Fear in Zimbabwe Fear in Zimbabwe has risen to alarming proportions to the benefit of the government. It is a way of suppressing the majority to organize themselves to change the difficult conditions that the government has created for them. The result is that people can only whisper to those that they know and trust, but whispers do not get far and wide very quickly. To those that are at a distance it may look like Zimbabweans are content with the conditions they are in and that is why they are not doing anything about it. But that is not true. Zimbabweans are whispering every where and as a result they don't hear each other or they hear different information all the time and therefore cannot take collective action to change the difficult conditions that those in government who in most cases live in good times have created for them. As a nation Fear has effectively disabled Zimbabweans. Mass Media in Zimbabwe The voices or shall I say the whispers of those that have a different thought or a different opinion to that of government is not allowed to access daily newspapers or 24/7 radio and television channels. No one in my country is allowed by the state to access mass media to talk about and express the conditions in which they live in let alone discuss the causes of the conditions. You are allowed to discuss only two issues, those that have nothing to do with the difficult conditions the majority of Zimbabweans find themselves in; or those that support the view of the government. All functioning broadcasting frequencies in the country belong to the government controlled Zimbabwe Broadcasting Company (ZBC) and so are all daily news papers. The voices of the suffering majority have been effectively shut down and they cannot listen to each other more so as we go towards the 2008 elections. It is only the government and those that support government views that are permitted to express themselves to the majority and every one else must shut up or whisper to a friend because if they dare shout they will be victimized, undressed naked by the government media, beaten or be picked in the middle of the night to be killed. There is currently is no way in my country that the majority of the population can talk back to government on any issue and be heard. Voices for Change: Amplifying the Whispers Voices For Change then has a big responsibility to mobilize, encourage and give support to artists to capture all these whispers and conditions, amplify them through their works and take them to government and to the majority of the people by all means possible till the next election. This is why today Zimbabwe needs a movement of voices ahead of any other type of movement.

Why a movement for Change? No one wants to live in difficult conditions for ever. This is so for the majority of Zimbabweans today. All they want is change of conditions that they live in and listening to the whispers we have concluded that the majority of the people want an enabling environment to allow them to change these conditions. Just as an example, let me give you one scenario that needs to be addressed or to be changed before Zimbabwe can hold what can pass for a free and fair election in 2008:

Only the government and their political party and those that agree with it have the right to access the radio, television and the daily press, while every one else is shut out. Not only do they use it to promote their policies that have created very difficult conditions for the people, but also use it to embarrass and spread lies and propaganda against those that speak out and have different views than themselves. They call it scoring political points against their opponents while their opponents are tied around a tree and have no media to score points. It can never be a fair fight. Never.

Zimbabwe, unlike other countries has very limited functional national broadcasting frequencies. Only four for radio and two for television and with some Section 38 of the Broadcasting Act all these have been given to the government controlled ZBC living nothing for other independent players in broadcasting. Need I explain more. The only thing I can say is that it is a sad thing that in a democracy that our government protects so much, it monopolizes all available air waves. This condition affects all of us in Zimbabwe and suppresses millions of voices everyday and must change before the next election can pass for anything close to free and fair. There can never be fairness in unfair conditions. This condition calls for change. Given the current broadcasting scenario in the country, the solution is clear:

- Get rid of Section 38 of the Broadcasting Act as a matter of urgency;

- Strip ZBC of two radio frequencies from its current four and license them to two independent broadcasters one to broadcast from the midlands and another from Bulawayo. Strip them of one of the two available national television frequencies and license it to an independent broadcaster to broadcast from Bulawayo. For government to control the only available frequencies in the country is unfair monopoly and disadvantages all other key players in politics, business, culture and social development. This is just one example and there are several other laws that make it impossible for people to have a voice with ought fear. In any democracy there must be room for peaceful protest. Voices For Change is a movement for promoting peaceful protests. I hope it gets your support in every way possible, within your means. I therefore call on all Zimbabwean artists to listen to the population as it whispers in fear and take that and build it into a production concept and bring it to Voices For Change. We will do our best to give the concept all necessary support to

produce it and take it to the people. We will post all work-in-progress and completed work on our website at www.voicesfromzimbabwe.com so that those that are sympathetic to the Zimbabwean cause can listen to the whispers that have been amplified to loud voices that can be heard across the country and all over the world till the next election. All protest ideas are welcome. Email them to us at myvoice@voicesfromzimbabwe.com. Zimbabwean artists, its time to be on the side of the majority of the Zimbabwean population that is living in very Difficult Times that are not of their own making, than be on the side of a few government and civil service individuals who are living in Good Times on behalf of the whole nation.

I will take this opportunity to thank all friends of the Voices For Change movement some of whom have donated the Voices website and others the online project management tools while some give their skills and expertise. The Voices For Change artists in Zimbabwe and those that are outside Zimbabwe need a lot of working tools and resources to support their protest work and efforts. We need more friends of the movement. Please log on to the voices website and join to become a Friend of the movement today. To those that are already Friends please help us mobilize friends across the globe. We need them. We need their ideas and support.

Can you imagine a Zimbabwe where once a week the police are running every where stopping all forms of protest entertainment in all sorts of venues from village trees to city streets to all public venues that day! Pulling down protest posters, collecting and burning all protest handouts and photos and a lot more! With your support this is possible to create so that the Zimbabwean government can get an opportunity to listen to the voices of the majority of its citizens and the citizens themselves get an opportunity to listen to each other. I present to you Voices For Change (VFC).

I thank you.

CONT MHLANGA

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