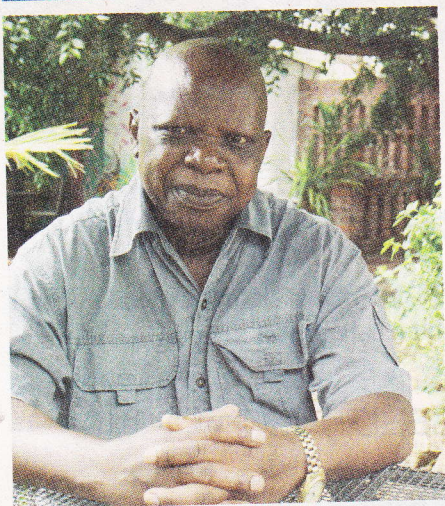




ABOVE: A food depot near Chiredzi in southeastern Zimbabwe where food aid is still used as a tool of control in the communal areas.

BELOW: Wilfred Mhanda is head of the Zimbabwe War Veteran's Forum, and has no faith left in either Zanu-PF or the opposition Movement for Democratic Change.



WHY READ IT?

- The Zimbabwe War Veteran's Forum focuses on lobbying diplomats for institutional reform.
- The MDC seems to think the next election won't be violent like all the others.
- Zanu-PF is not naïve and they won't give up power, cooperate, or desist from violence.

'Land reform a disaster' *A war veteran speaks*

Wilfred Mhanda was a senior commander in ZANLA, the military wing of Zanu-PF, and remains a respected figure in Zimbabwe. His fight for the liberation of Zimbabweans continues by lobbying diplomats to push for crucial institutional reforms. His is a view and a position too rarely expressed in a country going nowhere. **Sean Christie** spoke to him.

WHERE DO YOU STAND ON land reform in Zimbabwe? There was definitely a great land hunger among

Zimbabweans, and it is equally undeniable that this was not properly addressed.

The communal areas were terribly congested and needed to be decongested. What I am opposed to is the breakdown of orderly, peaceful land reform.

When the fast-track land reform programme was initiated, it was said that the whites weren't making enough farmland available, and that there was not enough land to drive land reform forward.

From my own experience I know this is not true. I was a cattle buyer at that time, in 2000. I was travelling around the

commercial agriculture areas and I came to know of several British farms, bought by the Zimbabwean government with British funds, which were lying fallow.

Land reform since then has been a huge failure, a disaster. The communal areas are as congested as ever. For years there's been terrible environmental degradation in these places, but now it's all over the country.

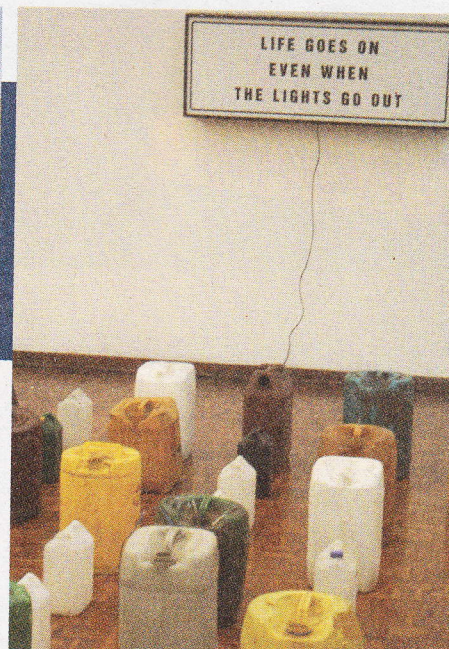
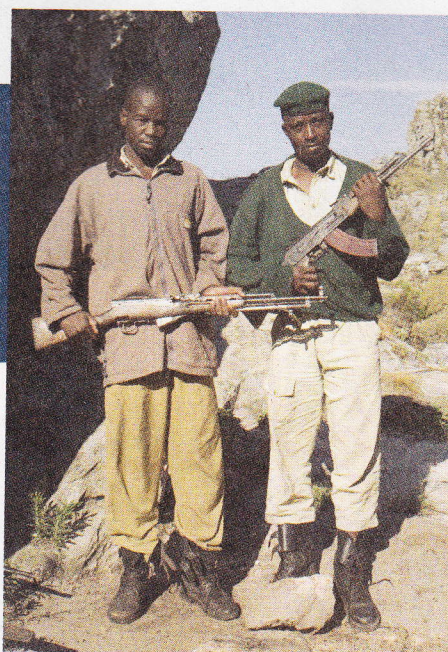
There are now gold panners in all our rivers. Our farms aren't managed by skilled farmers but in many cases by elite beneficiaries destroying the land.

All that the beneficiaries know how to harvest are natural resources like trees, fish, and wildlife. Plus, as everyone knows, land reform has been used as a tool for political control.

RIGHT: Mhanda says there is no way that Zanu-PF, which controls the Zimbabwean army, will give up power or desist from violence in the elections. Pictured are two soldiers patrolling on the country's eastern border.

FAR RIGHT: An art installation in Zimbabwe's National Art Gallery makes an obvious point about the state of the nation since land reform.

PHOTOS: SEAN CHRISTIE



What are your views on Ian Scoones's book *Land Reform in Zimbabwe: Myths and Failures*, which says land reform in Masvingo has been a partial success?

The book is very misleading. It's a patriotic account of land reform – whitewash, so to speak. It avoids the uncomfortable fact that new farmers can only get land if they are loyal to the ruling party.

Then, once on the land, they aren't given any title deeds – not even the elite get any. So when it comes to power struggles they know who to support or risk losing their land. Even the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) leaders have farms with no title deeds and are therefore afraid of losing their land if they misbehave.

So you can see how far the influence of land reform reaches when it comes to politics.

The MDC faces huge challenges since Wikileaks released classified US embassy documents that describe Mugabe as "a brilliant tactician" and the MDC as "far from ideal". Do you agree with this assessment? What is the status of the struggle between the MDC and Zanu-PF? And how is this going to play out ahead of the 2011 elections?

MDC treasurer-general Roy Bennett gave a speech in Paris recently where he described how Zanu-PF has used violence to secure power in nearly every election since independence. That was no exaggeration.

The only point of Bennett's that I disagree with is his assertion that Mugabe is merely a symbolic leader, and that others are in fact in charge of Zanu-PF. That couldn't be further from the truth, the old man is in complete control.

The MDC's biggest weakness at the moment is that they haven't been categorical about the elections. When, and how do they want them held and who do they want in the country observing them to ensure that they are free and fair? They seem to think this next election won't

be violent like all the others. That is totally naive. Zanu-PF, on the other hand, isn't naive. There is no way they will give up power, cooperate, or desist from violence.

I know these guys personally. Before they wouldn't give up power because they were making money from the parallel economy.

'There is no way Zanu-PF will give up power, cooperate, or desist from violence. I know these guys personally.'

They were printing Zim dollars at the official rate, which bore no resemblance to the black market rate, and with this they would buy forex, which was illegal for anyone else to possess, and which they would then use to buy things.

That game finished when the economy "dollarised", but now they have the diamonds at Marange. Diamonds are the worst thing to happen to this country. Now you have a situation where the Zanu-PF leadership has so much to lose, in the form of all this mineral wealth. So you tell me whether the election is going to be free and fair. No!

The only hope of that is if the MDC can get the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to intervene, otherwise Zimbabwe could end up in a worse situation than before.

How does the Zimbabwe War Veteran's Forum feature in all of this?

My forum doesn't deal with either of the

parties. We focus on the diplomats. We tell them that we want institutional reform and that the election should be seen as the start of institutional reform rather than an end in itself. We need courts that are strong and independent. We need a court in which you can prosecute a sitting president if need be.

Instead we have this government of national unity and a process to develop a new constitution. This constitutional route is just a diversion – after 18 months we still don't even have a voters' roll!

Everything positive that's happened in this country since the formation of the government of national unity has been donations. We can't even pay our own civil service without aid, and we can't audit these payments without aid.

What we need more than anything are genuine civil society groups, not just civil society which is an appendage of the MDC. We're talking to the diplomats about that and they're noticing, because it's their resources that are being abused.

Being so outspoken, do you not fear for your safety?

I fought side-by-side with many of the men in power, they know me, they respect me. If something happens to me the order must come from them, and that will not be an easy thing for them to do.

Just as it was during the war, none of our members are concerned about our safety. You must remember that Mugabe didn't fight in the war. He is just a beneficiary.

• E-mail Wilfred Mhanda at wmhanda@yahoo.com. |fw