

Pasurayi CHIKWENHERE- DUBE

*Embassy of the Republic of Zimbabwe
Kunstlaan, 21-22
1040 Brussel*

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I feel honoured to be amongst friends this morning and to have the opportunity of reflecting together on the progress achieved by Zimbabwe during ten years of its independent development. I am particularly impressed by the positive attitude and warmth towards my country - Zimbabwe - displayed by all the members of the Belgium-Zimbabwe Friendship Association I have met during the last nine months of my stay in Belgium. In today's fast changing world of modern technology in the field of communications, frontiers are crumbling, giving way to interdependence, transparency and cooperation among nations.

Ten years ago, Zimbabwe became independent after 90 years of colonial rule. Colonialism had left an unsavoury mark in all aspects of life and it has been the government's committed aim to eradicate inequalities and create a non-racial egalitarian state. Decades of conflict had generated a lot of hatred and resentment. The damage that had been brought on racial and social relationships should not be understated. It was a mammoth task that faced the government to bridge the gulf between the races, socially and economically. During the early stages of independence the policy of reconciliation introduced by the government meant tight rope walking. To the minority whites it meant a promise to maintain the old racial order while the majority blacks who had fought for independence saw reconciliation as a surrender of the very values they had suffered for. The then Prime Minister Robert

Gabriel Mugabe was very clear when he pointed out that reconciliation did not mean the maintenance of the status quo that the people had fought against and must be seen to be overthrowing. The Prime Minister was in a difficult position as one commentator put it of "taming the euphoric expectations of a downtrodden people entitled to euphoric expectations and calming the anxieties of the men who yesterday would have hanged him." Zimbabwe was born out of two antagonistic political and military sides with different allegiances and it has been nothing short of a miracle that has led to the attainment of racial and social integration. It is against this inherited background of conflict that Zimbabwe's ten years of independence should be analysed.

Without prejudicing your speech, Madam Chairperson, permit me to briefly highlight the main aspects of the Zimbabwe economy in terms of resources, infrastructures and economic indicators for the benefit of those who do not know Zimbabwe well. The Zimbabwe economy is well endowed with natural resources. There is a wide range of minerals including gold, silver, chromium, iron ore, copper, nickel, tin, asbestos, magnesites, lithium, sulphur and coal. Zimbabwe also has a sound agriculture supported by good rainfall and suitable land which can sustain intensive farming. The potential that exists in both mining and agriculture and the developments which have taken place in these sectors so far, provide a basis upon which the manufacturing industry, which now accounts for over 25 % of the gross domestic product, continues to grow. Growth in all these sectors has to take on board one vital component - development of our human resources. Government places great emphasis on the quality of Zimbabwe's manpower resources hence the policy it adopted in education. It is the aim of the Zimbabwe Government that by encouraging investment in the country, investors can harness the capabilities and general resourcefulness of Zimbabweans to generate sustainable growth of industry and the economy in general.

The economic infrastructure of Zimbabwe, which is well developed continues to expand. In the transport sector the country prides itself in an extensive road and rail network. The road density of some 22 km per 100 km² is one of the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa. Zimbabwe is almost self-sufficient in its non-petroleum energy needs which are based on coal and water.

Endowed with such rich natural resources and supported by a well developed infrastructure Zimbabwe renders itself a competitive attraction for investment both regionally and internationally. Economic growth during the decade under review has averaged 3 % in real terms with encouraging signs in the last two years - 1988 and 1989 - where growth reached 5 %. Unimpressed by these unchecked rates of growth which barely matched population growth, the Government of Zimbabwe introduced a number of policy reforms aimed at achieving a stable rate of medium-term economic growth of at least 5 % in real terms. Notable among these reforms were

the publication of the new Investment Register in 1989, the establishment of the Zimbabwe Investment Centre, the guaranteeing of protection for investments made in Zimbabwe and the relaxation of certain aspects of the foreign exchange control regulations. Another economic policy reform of immense interest to potential investors which is expected to be in place in the latter half of this year is the trade liberalisation programme.

The popularity of these reforms and the Government that introduced them can be measured by the overwhelming victory of President Robert Gabriel Mugabe and his party ZANU(PF) during the recently contested elections. A victory by a margin of over 80 % in the presidential elections and a clear sweep of 116 seats in the 119 contested constituencies, should dispel any doubt as to who the people of Zimbabwe want as their leader and Government.

I want to conclude, Madam Chairperson, by wishing our Belgium-Zimbabwe Friendship Association success in its deliberations today and in achieving its set goals of promoting better understanding of Zimbabwe's current situation among the Belgian people and the vital contributions they can make in accelerating Zimbabwe's development process.

I thank you.



President R. Mugabe at P.E. School, Harare
© K. Strubbe