

# Mnangagwa's hypocrisy of exploiting Tutsi genocide without acknowledging Gukurahundi

Recently, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC) wrote a pastoral letter expressing concerns about a "[multi-layered crisis of the convergence of economic collapse, deepening poverty, food insecurity, corruption and human rights abuses among other crises in urgent need of resolution](#)" in the Zimbabwe.

The letter, which began by quoting and drawing inspiration from the recently departed American politician and civil-rights leader [John Robert Lewis](#), made reference to biblical texts (Micah 7 vs 3 and Jeremiah 9 vs 12), denounced government for "[unresolved](#)" conflicts like the Gukurahundi massacres of the 80's and other "serious [human rights breaches](#)".

Obliquely, Zimbabwe's information minister Monica Mutsvangwa attacked the Bishops collectively and further ambushed the ZCBC president Archbishop Charles Ndlovu whom she accused of wanting to "[posit as the leader of righteous Ndebele minority by fanning the psychosis of tribal victimisation](#)".

Throwing her missiles, she further accused Ndlovu of "[inching to lead the Zimbabwe Catholic congregation into the darkest dungeons of Rwanda-type genocide](#)".

As if not enough, minister Mutsvangwa drew parallels between Ndlovu and Archbishop Arthanase Seromba, a Rwandan Catholic priest found guilty years ago for committing genocide and crimes against humanity during the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994.

However, there was cynicism in invoking the 1994 genocide. Mutsvangwa's intention was to present the gory scenes of mass murder from Rwanda while targeting priests for their decision to speak truly on a number of issues including the Gukurahundi. In other words, she was weaponizing the genocide in Rwanda to settle political scores.

This wasn't lost on the government as it later elected to retreat from her utterances, with initial indications that President Emmerson Mnangagwa was supposed to issue a ["comprehensive statement"](#) responding to the pastoral letter.

The dirty job to clean up the mess was, however, later carried out by justice minister Ziyambi Ziyambi who issued a winding tirade depicting unprecedented levels of confusion and a classical display of internal fissures and contradictions in the cabin!

Although Mnangagwa met with civil society leaders in Bulawayo a few days later, the die had already been cast. By referring to the emotive Gukurahundi massacres which occurred between 1983-1987, the government once again reminded Zimbabweans about the actions of the North Korean trained 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, which instituted massacres of the Ndebele ethnic population in the Midlands and the Matabeleland regions that the late President Robert Mugabe once referred to as madness "something which strongly offended families of victims."

Mnangagwa may have recently met with the Matabeleland Collective group in Bulawayo as part of a gesture of openness but his infamous utterances in March 1983, in (Matabeleland North), where he likened dissidents to "cockroaches and bugs" rang on the minds of many!

Zimbabweans remembered how Mnangagwa could have become like the biblical Saul, who later became Paul after a dramatic transformational encounter with Christ on his way to Damascus, where he sought to persecute Christians.

The bible says:

“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” (Acts 9 vs 4-7).

Perhaps a “Christlike” voice may have spoken to Mnangagwa when he thundered the “Voice of the people is the Voice of God” during his “early” post-coup days. At any rate, Mnangagwa’s attempt to engage the victims of the Gukurahundi falls by the wayside considering his continuing propensity to divide Zimbabweans further at any given opportunity, by calling his critics dark forces and terrorists.

Mnangagwa’s hate speech in the 1980s, which did the bidding for his principal Robert Mugabe, was later repeated by former Rwandan politician [Leon Mugesera](#), a convicted genocidaire who described Tutsi’s in similarly dehumanizing terms.

Journalists who regurgitated government’s statement calling the Catholic Bishops “evil minded” and “genocidal” for raising general questions of bad governance may have acted culpably just like the Radio Television Libres des Mille Collines and the Hutu extremist newspaper Kangura.

Ironically, after Zimbabweans had been served with the poisoned chalice of an invective filled statement, Rwanda’s Ambassador to Zimbabwe James Musoni, was talking about [Umuganura Day](#) celebrations which serves as a thanksgiving intended to commemorate [“unity among Rwandans and an opportunity to assess the past, celebrate achievements, correct mistakes and plan for the future.”](#) Was Zimbabwe listening?

Even if one were to go by the official line which prefers to call the Gukurahundi atrocities “disturbances”, how is it that Rwanda, which went through a genocide has leapfrogged Zimbabwe in most social and economic indicators?

In Rwanda, where I have visited several times, you would never hear such toxic language from ordinary Rwandese (whether Hutu or Tutsi), let alone a government minister who is supposed to be measured in tone! That the Minister did not resign typifies her lack of remorse and the fact that Mnangagwa did not fire her typifies his complicity!

That, the Zimbabwean government which established diplomatic relations with Rwanda following the inception of the “new dispensation” now resorts to use the Gukurahundi and the Tutsi genocide for purposes of instilling fear to clerics raising the spectre of bad governance, which most relate with as an indictment to Mnangagwa’s leadership.

To perceive Archbishop Ndlovu of Zimbabwe and his clerics in similar terms with Rwanda’s Seromba is disingenuous. Seromba and other senior Roman Catholic figures in Rwanda were complicit for siding with the Hutu extremist government which saw the massacre of the Tutsi, something which the Catholic Bishops have not done in Zimbabwe.

In attacking the Roman Catholic Church, Mnangagwa’s government has proven to be unprincipled. His ascendancy to the throne via a military coup was dependent on the role played by respected cleric [Father Fidelis Mukonori](#) who became an intermediary between Robert Mugabe and the “generals”. It is duplicitous of him therefore to smear the Zimbabwean Catholic bishops, by disparaging them as appendages of vested colonial interests and “regime change agents”.

How can it be that Mnangagwa’s government, which three years ago rode on the goodwill of Zimbabweans, now sees shadows everywhere! How can it be that churches who supported Mnangagwa are now disenchanting, disenfranchised and immobilised by the state?

Unfortunately, a cornered Mnangagwa now resorts to using tired [indigenous church leaders](#) and other fly by night characters

whom it portrays as the true faces of the “uncontaminated” African Independent Churches, as opposed to the “divisive” Roman Catholic Church and its bishops in Zimbabwe!

While there could have been similarities in the inflammatory language used in the Gukurahundi and the genocide, there is a sea of difference in the way Zimbabwe and Rwanda have approached these two tragedies; stark difference is observed in approaches to building the nation, beyond ensuring tribal cohesion and unity.

Rwanda’s official recognition of its past is embodied by the Genocide Memorial in Kigali and other reception centres in the country. Victims of the genocide in Rwanda are remembered by visuals which include pictures and skulls. However, despite Mnangagwa’s frequenting to Bulawayo, the government continues to haggle about carrying out exhumations of victims and owning up to this transgression through documentation, as well as on the provision of death certificates!

In contriving parallels between the Gukurahundi and the Tutsi Genocide, the Zimbabwean government also forgot that in 1994 the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), under the leadership of President Paul Kagame took power from the National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development. Consequently, a change of political circumstances in Rwanda, out of a protracted post independent struggle, has allowed a latitude of addressing the genocide through holding the perpetrators accountable. However, Zimbabwe’s post-independent life has been dominated by ZANU PF, which appears insincere in addressing the emotive Gukurahundi issue!

Instead of using the Tutsi genocide for political expedience, it is crucial for Zimbabwe to continue learning from Rwanda on how the country has progressed twenty-six years after the genocide and the role of honest reflection in that recovery.