LIBERATION THROUGH PARTICIPATION

Women in the Zimbabwean Revolution

Writings and Documents from ZANU and the ZANU Women's League
Build the ZANU Women's Campaign!

The women of Zimbabwe, under the leadership of ZANU(PF), played a key role in the struggle to eliminate white settler rule and imperialism from their nation and to reclaim Zimbabwe for African people. Under the slogan put forward by ZANU(PF), "Liberation Through Participation", thousands of women actively joined the people's war in every capacity. 25-30% of the liberation army, ZANLA, was comprised of women at the time of independence. Women were a militant force in the revolution because through the struggle to liberate their nation, they were engaged in a struggle to liberate themselves.

These writings and documents from ZANU(PF) and the ZANU Women's League provide ideological and practical leadership to women in struggle everywhere against imperialism. The lessons of the Zimbabwean revolution and the struggle of women within it enrich the world revolutionary movement and the worldwide struggle for women's liberation. The women of Zimbabwe are clear -- the struggle for women's liberation is inseparable from the struggle to defeat imperialism and white supremacy and the building of socialism.

We are printing this collection of writings from ZANU(PF) to help build the ZANU Women's Campaign in this critical period of national reconstruction. In this concrete way we contribute to the ZANU Women's League's ability to advance the leadership and skills of the masses of Zimbabwean women so that they can participate fully in developing a new socialist society and win full liberation. Through the ZANU Women's Campaign we can contribute to the consolidation of a free and independent Zimbabwe. This is part of continuing anti-imperialist solidarity with the Zimbabwean revolution and with the ongoing struggle to free all of Southern Africa from white supremacy and imperialist domination.

Zimbabwe will not be secure to determine its own future until all of Southern Africa is free. We commit ourselves to that struggle, knowing that the defeat of imperialism in Southern Africa will be a decisive blow, bringing closer the time when all the world's peoples are free to build societies free of oppression and exploitation.

We extend our solidarity to the women of Zimbabwe, the people of Zimbabwe, and the Republic of Zimbabwe.

PAMBERI NE ZIMBABWE!

National Campaign in Solidarity with the ZANU Women's League
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First Zimbabwe Women's Seminar
Opening Speech by Comrade Robert Mugabe, Prime Minister of the Republic of Zimbabwe
President, Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front)

I wish to greet you all in the name of the Central Committee of ZANU, in the name of our National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and in the name of the seven million struggling and oppressed masses of Zimbabwe. You are happily gathered here today in response to the call by the Party, through its department of Women's Affairs, to hold a very important Seminar, and historic meeting convened with three definite objectives.

The first is for you to study, analyse and assess the role of women in the national struggle and in the effort to develop a socialist society in our country.

The second objective is to assist our Central Committee in organising and shaping the Department of Women's Affairs in both form and content so that we have a viable, intact and effective women's organ capable of serving as an instrument for educating and mobilising women alongside their menfolk both in the performance of revolutionary tasks and in achieving equality, dignity and respect.

The third is to work out a practical programme for women including set tasks for accomplishment this year in accordance with the overall Party programme and its general tasks.

The role our women should play today in the bitter struggle against imperialism and colonialism is determined by the degree of their freedom, readiness and commitment to play that role. Custom and tradition have tended more to favour men than women, to promote men and their status and demote women in status, to erect men as masters of the home, village, clan and nation and pin down women as mistresses of the same home, village, clan and nation. Admittedly, women have, even in the context of the family, village, clan and nation, been allowed sometimes a significant, but at other times a deplorably insignificant, role to play. The general principle governing relationships between men and women has, in our traditional society, always been that of superiors and inferiors. Our society has consistently stood on the principle of masculine dominance - the principle that the man is the ruler and the woman his dependant and subject.

Thanks to education and enlightenment, some change in the attitude of men to women has occurred. Thanks also to the equalising effect of the oppressive racist settler system, cruel, exploitative and suppressive to both sexes alike, men and women have jointly shared a common deprivation, and so a common grievance, formed a common war-front and built a common fighting force against a common enemy - the colonial settler regime. Thanks further still to other nations' experiences and their influence upon us, there is now a growing opinion in our society in favour of the emancipation of women.

It is necessary, therefore, to study the role of the Zimbabwe women both generally in society and specifically in the context of the national struggle against white settler colonialism, with a view to ascertaining the degree of her participation and the extent to which the structures of tradition and custom have yielded to new circumstances, the law of necessity and the call for cultural transformation in her favour.

Pre-colonial Status of Women

Before the forcible occupation of our country by the British settler column in 1890, tradition and customs, whether it was Shona or Ndebele recognised a patriarchal society. The Head of the family was the man. He it was and not the woman who gave "his blood" to the children all of whom became known after him and naturally belonged to his clan adopting both his mututu (totem) and chidawo (praise totem). The woman continued to maintain her clan and blood ties with her own family and never lost her mututu although she might have lost her chidawo. She was thus regarded a stranger to the man's family - mwana wevaridzi. The child born of her, despite the nine months he spent in her womb, was never hers by customary right of ownership; he remained her child only as long as the marriage between her and the husband was good.

Even when the marriage was good, the man, when angry with her over her handling of children or in any other provocative circumstances, would chide her for 'mishandling', 'spoiling' or 'neglecting' 'his children'. The wife too when fed up with the husband not infrequently appealed to him to take 'his children' and allow her to go to 'her home'.

A woman became a man's wife upon payment by the man to the woman's family of dowry. In Shona and Ndebele...
society this was partly monetary, but principally, in form of cattle. Customary law never regarded dowry as a price paid for the woman but more as a token of gratitude from the man's family to the woman's family. The payment of the dowry entitled the man to marry the woman, bring her to his home and demand her domestic and agricultural field services. In every case no woman could marry without parental consent.

Society being patriarchal, women were not allowed to sit at court to hear cases, although they were allowed to become witnesses. Family property could only be owned by men, save in the case of domestic utensils, personal gifts or direct bequests. Women could, however, personally acquire property, through kinds of personal labour or as share of dowry paid for the daughter.

Men practised polygamy, but no polyandry was conceivable in both Shona and Ndebele societies. The moral uprightness demanded of women was most exacting. They had to be virgins before marriage, otherwise some compensation to console the 'unfortunate' man who married a non-virgin was always payable by the wife's family who would exact it from the woman's sexual violator.

All in all, the woman's position was despicable. But there were definite recognisable features of an area of her limited dominance. She was the midwife. She shared with men the rare phenomenon of being a spirit medium. She also could inherit from a parent or ancestor, or acquire through association and tutorship, knowledge of indigenous herbs and potents or the power of divining. She could, in a similar way become a much dreaded witch.

Within the family, she had a strong hold over the girls whom she brought up her own way, in most cases to become as good mothers and housewives as she herself. Thus, while all sons pursued the father's or grandfather's masculine line towards manhood and marriage, all the daughters in the family followed the feminine path to womanhood and marriage. Certain activities were common, such as working in the crop fields, herding cattle (though principally a boy's function) and collecting firewood.

Wars were naturally fought by men but women provided all the necessary food from the rear, while they took care of the property in the absence of the men. It was never conceived that they could go to the front and, alongside men attack the enemy with spears, battle-axes or bows and arrows.

This then was the traditional position before European settlement in 1890. The woman's role in society was mainly supplementary to that of the man.

**Settler Colonialism and its impact**

The instrument employed by Cecil John Rhodes and the British Government of the day in acquiring our country was a company granted a charter for occupational purposes. The British South African Company was formed and sponsored by colonialist Rhodes in its operation of 1890 when it hoisted a British flag in Harare calling it Fort Salisbury. The colonial venture revulsed and angered our entire nation. First, the Ndebele a segment of the Zulus who had come to Zimbabwe under Umzilikazi and had settled in the western region around Bulawayo, organised a War of Resistance against European occupation in 1893 but suffered defeat. However, in 1896 – 1897, followed a more national liberation war, Chimurenga I, which was led by Mkwati, Nehanda and Kagwui, while such chiefly heroes and regional commanders like Mashayamombe and Makoni participated in it with remarkable bravery and honour. Our people were defeated because of the superiority of British weapons and all the leaders got martyred.

In the war situation necessitated by the forcible seizure of our fatherland, we notice for the first time a woman hero as the spirit medium of the rising to the occasion inspiring, directing, commanding and leading men in the battle against the enemy. Nehanda Nyakasikana, appears in our war annals of post-colonial Zimbabwe as the first war heroine and martyr. She did not lead just a battalion or regional army but a national army in a national struggle for the overthrow of Company rule and recovery of the fatherland. She was defiant and obdurate to the end, refusing to compromise and subject herself to a process exacting her penitence for a just Liberation War she had proudly, valiantly and justifiably fought but lost.

Nehanda was obviously a distinct and exceptional character who rose to revolutionary ascendency, not by mere display of leadership qualities such as her command, courage, bravery and planning ability, but by principally her spiritual power as a spirit medium. Our society has always feared and respected women possessed with spirits or medicinal power. They strike the men with awe and invoke in them a subservience that no doubt contradicts their general traditional attitude to women. It is in those rare circumstances that our women have sometimes commanded men. It was indeed in those circumstances that Nehanda was able to demonstrate her powers and to command the respect of men.

After conquest, however, many spirit mediums were hounded, persecuted and suppressed. Many went underground and began operating only in a limited capacity. At the same time as the spirit mediums were being persecuted, the Chiefs and Headmen who had been involved in the joint planning of the national war strategy were either put to death, demoted or kept under strict surveillance.

A general intimidation campaign was waged throughout the country by the British South African Company security forces, property being destroyed or confiscated, women being raped and men being whipped, tortured or incarcerated.

Men and women were therefore equally ill-treated by the enemy thus retaining equality in their suffering of indignities.

With the establishment of large individual farms and the development of town and mining centres, traditional life suffered a social disturbance as men, partly voluntarily and partly under compulsion supplied the cheap labour that was needed there. Women
Comrade Teurai Ropa - ZANU's Secretary for Women's Affairs speaking at the Women's Seminar

rlying war material to it from the rear, but they also fight on the front and become exposed to the enemy's bullets in the same way as men. Our women have scored numerous victories alongside the men. They have demonstrated beyond all doubt that they are as capable as men and deserve equal treatment, both in regard to training and appointments.

It is because of their proven performance that we have agreed to constitute a Women's Detachment with its own commander who should become a member of the High Command. It is also necessary, I feel, that at this very advanced stage of our armed struggle we should promote more women to the High Command. We are gratified that we have a large number of women officers at the General Staff level. As our ZANLA grows, the number of women officers is also bound to increase. This is certainly development and transformation, which naturally must be preceded by the transformation of the individual.

Let us examine briefly the spread of women over the echelons of the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army and examine the distribution of their functions and the tasks they perform. Although in the High Command there is only one woman, Comrade Sheba Tavarwisa, who is also Deputy Secretary of Education and Culture in the Central Committee, in the General Staff, there are now scores of women officers, while in the Army generally several thousands of women cadres gallantly serve in one role or another.

In the various operational departments of ZANLA, our women cadres can be found daily performing set tasks. We find them in the Department of Operation, in the Army Commissariat, in the Logistics and Supplies Department, in the Department of Security and Intelligence as officers and cadres, in the Department of Training as instructors, in the Department of Personnel, Production and Construction, Medical Service, Education and Culture, Welfare and Transport. In the Medical and Educational Department, women nursing cadres and teachers are performing wonderful work. I am sure, when the representatives of the Departments here give you a brief account of their work, you will readily appreciate some of the good work that has been taking place. Let me just single out the Commissariat work that is taking place in the Operational Areas, especially in the Liberated Zones. We have sent into the country teams of women cadres to carry out in several areas political work amongst our people. They talk to fathers, mothers, boys and girls, and the response has been wonderful all over. The woman cadres, like her male counterpart, is, everywhere she goes, a fighter, a political activist, and a producer. Every ZANLA cadre carries three weapons:

- The gun to fight the enemy with and defend the masses.
- Politics to give the direction and purpose of the struggle.
- The hoe for production, so we can eat, be healthy and be able to fight.

We shall continue to build a large women's force through intensified military and political training. It is not only our belief but is indeed now Party Policy to develop our women not only politically and militarily, but also technically and professionally so that we prepare ourselves fully for the War as well as for the struggle after victory. In this regard, the needs that are felt most amongst women in terms of their advancement should manifest themselves in their particular forms through the various Party Departments, but generally and more earnestly and in a co-ordinated form through the Department of Women's Affairs. This brings us to the subject of this Department in the context of Party Organisation.

The Party Organisation And Women

When Zanu was formed in August, 1963, it recognised clearly the fundamental role of the woman as an activist alongside her male counterpart in the Party. That is why provision was made in our Constitution for the creation of the ZANU WOMEN'S LEAGUE.

ZANU Women's League:

This is a women's organisation which is also a component of the Party. It builds itself upwards from the Branch level to the District, Provincial and National levels. The executive committees of the Women's League shall at every level comprise the same number of people as those of the Main Body at a corresponding level. At the Branch level of the Women's League there shall be the following office-bearers: Branch Chairman, Branch Vice Chairman, Branch Secretary, Branch Treasurer, Branch Organising Secretary and Branch Publicity Secretary.

The District Council of the Women's League shall have the same number of office-holders as those stated above.

The Provincial Council of the Women's League shall have the following officers: Chairman, Vice Chairman, Secretary, Administrative Secretary, Treasurer, Financial Secretary, Organising Secretary and Publicity Secretary.

The National Executive Committee of the Women's League is elected by Provincial delegates at the Inter-Provincial Women's League Conference. The Executive Committee comprises the following persons: Chairman, Vice Chairman, Secretary, Administrative Secretary, Treasurer, Financial Secretary, Organising Secretary.
Secretary and Publicity Secretary.

Because of modifications in our pattern of organisation resulting from the experience we have gained over years, there are bound to be qualitative changes in the old structure. We now have, for example a Political Commissar at every level of the Organisation and this function would have to be reflected in all the executive committees.

During the period 1963 - 1964, before the Party was proscribed, it never became possible for us to constitute the Women’s League and the Youth League. We must begin working towards it now, although it is not practically possible yet to establish a full Women’s League.

The Women’s League is, at every level subordinate to the corresponding main organ of the Party. The Women’s League Branch to the Main Branch, the Women’s League District Provincial Branch to the Main Provincial Branch, and finally the National Executive of the Women’s League comes under the Party’s National Executive Committee, falling directly under the Department of Women’s Affairs. But what is the composition and structure of the Department of Women’s Affairs?

Department of Women’s Affairs;

The Head of the Department of Women’s Affairs is the Secretary for Women’s Affairs, elected by Congress, or in the absence of Congress, elected by the Central Committee. Under her is the Deputy Secretary for Women’s Affairs elected by the Congress of the Women’s League. At the moment the Central Committee has elected Comrade Teurai Ropa as the Secretary for Women’s Affairs. This meeting would, therefore, have to elect one for approval by the Central Committee.

We have proposed that there be an Administrator for Women’s Affairs who will work under the Deputy Secretary for Women’s Affairs. The functions of the Women’s Affairs Department are three:

- Political
- Military
- Diplomatic (External Relations).

There must, therefore, be three wings:

- The Political Wing
- The Military Wing
- The External Relations Wing.

Each wing should be headed by a Secretary. The three Secretaries are directed by the Administrator. As much as possible this meeting must help us to complete this structure. The Administrator and the three Secretaries will be finally appointed by the Central Committee, but this meeting can, through the Secretary for Women’s Affairs, make nominations which the Central Committee will be free to approve or reject.

- The Secretary for the Political Wing shall concern herself with the organisation and functioning of the Women’s League and shall therefore report to the Department of Women’s Affairs on the activities of the League as well as carry Departmental instructions to the League.
- The Secretary for the Political Wing, who shall also be the Commander of the Women’s Detachment, shall concern herself with the organisation and functioning of the Women’s Detachment and shall regularly report on the activities of the Detachment to the Department of Women’s Affairs as well as carry Departmental instructions to the Detachment.
- The Secretary for External Organisations shall establish and maintain contact with external Women’s Organisations and regularly report on relations with them or on their important activities, to the Department.

We are determined that the Department of Women’s Affairs shall be a well-defined viable entity of the Party’s organic structure.

The role of Women in Socialist Countries

Women in both socialist and non-socialist countries have participated in the struggle for their emancipation. As a Liberation Movement with a socialist programme we are particularly interested in the role and position of women in Socialist countries, so we can, by comparison, judge our progress or lack of progress in the process for the advancement of our own women.

The Soviet Union

Lenin, the brain and hero behind the application of Marxist-Leninist principles to the Soviet Union, held extremely progressive views about women. He wrote in his Works:

"If women are not drawn into public service, into militia, into political life, women are not torn out of their stupefying house and kitchen environment, it will be impossible to build even democracy, let alone socialism."

(Coll. W., Pr. Publ., Vol.23, p.32,1964)

Today, women in the Soviet Union Comprise 51% of the entire labour force. The law, of course, forbids employment of women in difficult and harmful forms of work.

The People’s Republic of China

Mao Tse-Tung, the greatest exponent of Marxism-leninism after Lenin and Stalin, who was the brain and hero behind China’s revolutionary struggle, condemned the system under which Chinese women were. He says in his Works:

“As for women, in addition to being dominated by three systems (The state system, the clan system and the supernatural system) they are also dominated by the men..... and (which) are four thick ropes binding the Chinese people particularly the peasants.”


It is Chairman Mao who also said, “When women all over the country rise up, that will be the day of the victory of the Chinese revolution.”

Last year, in September, the women of China held their Fourth National Women’s Congress which gave a new impetus for women’s full participation in the socialist revolution and construction. Mao had foreseen that the abolition of “the clan system, superstition, and inequality between men and women” would follow “as a natural consequence of victory in the political and economic struggle”. (Selected Works, Vol. 1 page 47.)

The Socialist Republic of Romania

The achievement of socialism in Romania resulted in the creation of conditions in which women were accorded full equal rights and enabled to participate to the best of their ability in all domains of activity. Women account for more than half of the country’s population. The leading body of the women’s movement is the Women’s National Council elected by the National Conference. The Romanian Communist Party attaches great importance to women’s capability and is greatly concerned about their role in the entire economic life.

When we visited Romania in November last year with Comrade Teurai Ropa, we held a meeting with a delegation of the Trade Union Council.
the Secretary Filips, who, in addition to being the Vice President of the National Council of Women. We arranged for Comrade Teurai later to meet leaders of the Confederation, is also the Vice Federation which included Cornelia women workers peasants, students, women who are highly skilled. Generally, there is serious attention paid to the promotion of women in society in all its fields of activity.

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

The Women in Yugoslavia having participated in the resistance struggle against fascism in the second world war and, alongside their menfolk, defeated the enemy, paved a way to their emancipation in society. Now the Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, like the constitutions of many other socialist countries, protects their right of equality. Section 154 of that Constitution provides:

"Citizens shall be equal in their rights and duties regardless of nationality, race, sex, language, religions, education or social status, all shall be equal before the law."

But the Yugoslav women are not only equal with men before the law, they are also equal with them in the political and socio-economic system thus enjoying the same rights and privileges and bearing equal duties and responsibilities.

The Republic of Cuba,

President Fidel Castro, the valiant fighter who led the Cuban Revolution, states, in the Report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba to the First Congress that the Cuban women tradition of struggle can be traced back to the days of cruelty of the conquerors and - the whip of the slave-holders. The Participation of the Cuban woman continued to increase as the situation demanded. The women finally created their own organisation on August 23, 1960 and this is the Federation of Cuban Women (FCW), which united all existing women's revolutionary organisations.

The Federation now has 21,270,000 women workers peasants, students, housewives, professionals and others.

The Federation of Cuban Women has striven hard to enhance the dignity and advance the social and human emancipation of Cuban women. Already much work has been undertaken to eradicate remaining prejudices against women and to achieve their full equality and liberation. This was also the objective of the FCW's Second Congress held in November, 1974.

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam

Ho Chi Minh, the illustrious leader of the Vietnamese liberation struggle once said, "If the women are not emancipated, socialism is only half-established."

The women of Vietnam fought for liberation against American imperialism, bringing down United States aircraft, capturing U.S. pilots, setting U.S. warships ablaze, and bravely protecting their villages.

One of the present leaders of Vietnam, Le Duan, has written in his Selected Writings describing the Vietnamese concept of a new woman: "(She is) one who carries out well her duty as a socialist citizen. One who fulfils satisfactorily her noble function as a wife in the family. As a matter of fact, in every society a woman is a citizen, mother and wife." (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Hanoi, 1977, p. 381.)

The People's Democratic Republic of Korea.

The Great Korean leader, Comrade Kim Il Sung, recalled in his "Address to the Communist Workers of the Women's Union scheduled to attend the First Conference of the Democratic Women's Union of North Korea" in 1964, that for ages in the past the Korean women were despised socially and in their homes because of the old feudal idea of respecting the man and despising the woman. Women had no freedom of marriage and were not allowed to leave their homes at will. They were even sold as chattels.

Kim Il Sung advocates some measures for purposes of organising and advancing women such as the following:
- Casting aside backward customs and habits handed down from old society.
- Intensify education among women so as to increase their political awareness and grasp of knowledge.
- Intensify enlightenment work so as to wipe out superstition.
- Mothers should be fitted to play an important part in the education of their children.
- There should be an intensive campaign to wipe out illiteracy among women.
- Women workers must be encouraged to participate actively in nationbuilding.
- There should be provided equal rights between men and women and the utmost care of women because they are physically weaker than men. Women workers should be granted maternity leave and get paid 100 per cent of their salaries.
- Women cannot get their rights as gifts. They themselves should actively fight for them.

Mocambican women fought side by side with their men.(left)
Josina Machel: died in armed struggle.(right)
Women intellectuals should be mobilised properly for national work. Our women intellectuals can do a good deal to eliminate illiteracy and promote cultural enlightenment. They can work in many fields including education, culture and public health.

- The Women's Union would do well to organise and run many small-scale nurseries and kindergartens.

In Africa.

Socialist States like Tanzania, Guinea, Mozambique, Angola, Ethiopia and Guinea Bissau, have all encouraged and organised women's organisations which promote both the full and active participation of women in the diverse activities of the State and the emancipation of the woman towards equality with men.

In Mozambique, there is O.M.M. (Organisation of Mozambican Women). At the First Conference of the Mozambican Women held in 1973, President Samora Machel in his Opening Speech stressed the main theme of the Conference as "To study questions concerning the emancipation of women, to find lines of action which will lead to the emancipation." President Machel deplored the status of women whom he regarded as: "The most oppressed, humiliated and exploited beings in society. A woman is even exploited by man who is himself exploited, beaten by the man who is lacerated by the palmatoria, humiliated by the man who is crushed under the boot of the boss and settler."

He emphasized the need for the emancipation of women as a fundamental necessity for the Revolution.


Today in liberated Mozambique, the O.M.M. is working vigorously for the advancement of women in all spheres of life.

Conclusion

I tried to give you the nature of the problem facing us today regarding the status of the Woman against a background of circumstances which have enhanced her role. The colonial system which was superimposed upon the traditional system created for the woman two levels of oppression - that of traditional society as the first level and that of the political and socioeconomic system suffered by both the man and the woman as the second level. I tried also to show that the grievances generated by the colonial system were shared by all members of the African community. Hence the need that arose for men and women together as equals under oppression to join hands in the common struggle for national liberation. The national struggle, therefore, especially at its higher level, when it became armed national struggle, became as much a process towards the liberation of the nation as towards the emancipation of the woman. The Party has, by waging armed struggle, created, therefore, a process generative of forces that will result in the total liberation of the woman. But the Party has also a specific and distinct organic structure to ensure the full enrolment of women and their active participation in a struggle in which they alone will reap a double reward - national liberation and, in its context, their own liberation.

It is thus imperative that this meeting should take definite decisions relating to:

- The maximisation of women's involvement in the liberation struggle in general following the Party line and direction.
- Maximum recruitment of women with all kinds of potential into the Party as both military and political cadres.
- The formulation of a definite programme with specific tasks for fulfilment by the Women's Affairs Department, bearing in mind the eleven tasks for this Year of the People's Storm (Gore re Gukurahundi).
- The compelling need to study the needs of each and every woman cadre in ZANLA so as to assess the kind of assistance the Party can give towards her intellectual and technical advancement.
- The organisation of the units of the Political Wing of the Party and the Women's Detachment and the fighting of divisive tendencies and narrow concepts.
- The organisation of a programme of establishing contact and sound relations with progressive women's organisations in other countries.
- The intensification of women's political, educational, medical, productive and other functions in liberated and semi-liberated areas.
- The formulation of a programme for the promotion and maintenance of the moral and cultural integrity and respect of the Zimbabwe woman.
- A survey of customary law practice and tradition which a view to the modification of those aspects which inhibit the emancipation of woman.
- The expected role of the male cadres and Party militants in working alongside the women cadres and Party militants for the progress towards the emancipation and advance of the woman.

I have the pleasure in now declaring this meeting open and wish you well in your deliberations. I hope this meeting will be a great experience to all of you and ourselves. We have to achieve progress here so we can be in step with the military advances and victories accruing to us every day. Thank you.
Why I Joined ZANLA Women’s Detachment

by Sarudzai Churucheminzwa,

I was born and brought up in the Mount Darwin district of Zimbabwe. Like most African families in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia), I was born of a poor family. Being an African woman, I suffered so much both from class-racial exploitation and the wretched feudal idea of "male supremacy" that I grew to resent sharply the society I found myself in.

At home freedom of social movement was more easily accorded to my brothers than to me and my older and younger sisters. I somehow disliked the notion that hard work and initiative were associated with men in society. Women are taken to be fragile and shy and any who do not conform with this characterization is taken to be unfeminine and unrespectable.

Thus in society women were considered to be members of the "weaker" or "fairer" sex, etc. I soon realized that in my society all that is there for women to do is cooking, child-bearing, and child-care at home. However, like all African women in Zimbabwe, I occasionally was forced to relieve some of my brothers of their "manly" duties so as to maintain our meager existence from Smith's racial exploitation.

As I grew up I strongly resented the attitude of my society, which deliberately underrated and underestimated women's capabilities to mold society. Such an attitude deprived many women of giving assistance where they could and all incentives to cultivate their talents as human beings. My brothers gained a lot of experience, physically and intelligence-wise, from their hard work and adventures in looking after cattle in thick forests, cutting firewood, taming cattle for field ploughing and from all such hard tasks accorded to them by society. Because of this, even my younger brothers began to challenge me physically.

I was even more embarrassed when at school we had heated arguments to the extent that women were regarded as biologically less intelligent than men. This irritated me very much since it took away every inch of my pride as an equal human being with my male counterpart. I was not at all consoled when such an argument was somehow substantiated by the fact that top class positions at the end of the year were usually scored by our male colleagues.

After finishing school, I was more disappointed with my life and my society because even with my successful school results I couldn't find a job. I had a horde of school certificates, but what could these papers give me? In my search for employment I met great disillusionment. The situation was even more perplexing for my parents who had stretched all their resources to send me to school only to meet such frustration. They had sold almost all our cattle to get me to school in the hope that I would help them after completing my school career. Instead they became poorer and we had to strain ourselves to maintain our existence.

I decided to go home and help my parents in the fields. With only five acres of poor, sandy fields and four head of cattle for our family of twelve we just couldn't manage it. We were really finished. Most of my brothers were forced to go and roam the streets of Salisbury and endure all the frustration that accompanied this. Even after my brothers left, it was still difficult to maintain ourselves this way.

The situation compelled my mother and me to go and work for a local boer farmer. Here I found that virtually all the women and boys from our village were employed by this local despot. In great contrast to the conditions of our family, this boer alone had a vast stretch of rich arable land, so big in fact that it was difficult for him to maintain it; most of it remained idle.

We really sweated with hard work for this boer. Our work ranged from ploughing and hoeing the fields to cotton-picking and curing. The daily routine of work on the farm was from 6 A.M. to 6 P.M. with only 30 minutes' rest at lunch-time all week long with the exception of Sundays when we were required to stay indoors. Our pay was very meager. In fact it was unrelated to the amount of work we were exerting on the farm. We were each paid only one dollar and two buckets of mealie-meal and a few ounces of rotten beans a day. From this inhuman treatment we were getting, it was easy for me to see how it was possible for this boer to own a big luxurious house, several cars and a huge store. My experiences at this farm increased my hatred of these rapacious boers.

It was a revelation to me and my village when ZANLA (the armed wing of ZANU) opened my way to the struggle in Zimbabwe in 1972. ZANLA heroically laid down roots in the Northeastern regions of Zimbabwe. Everyone began to revive hope for freedom and the news spread around villages like wild fire. ZANLA spoke of the liberation of the poor and exploited and the smashing of capitalism in Zimbabwe.

The idea of joining ZANLA didn't take long for me. My chief problem was to find ZANLA. The presence of ZANLA in Zimbabwe was unquestioned, but during the initial stages it needed concerted efforts on one's part to find the "ZANLA UNDERGROUND." However, as time went on, this "ZANLA UNDERGROUND" began to uncover itself and its footholds began to be more defined in the Northeastern regions of Zimbabwe—Shamva, Mazoe, Moko, Mrewa, Bindura, Mt. Darwin, Centenary and Sipolilo districts.

So a girl friend of mine and myself decided to take the challenge and hunt for ZANLA in areas infested with gossips about ZANLA activities. It took us a few weeks of search and investigations around villages to find a ZANLA Base. This particular base was situated along a small stream between small hills and the area was marked by thick vegetation. Before we got into this base we went through a very vigilant sentry so strategically situated that we couldn't enter the base without being noticed.

Having convinced the sentry about the faithfulness of our mission and our intentions, we were passed on to the comrade in charge of the base. The commander of this base, a very young fighter, interrogated us on the reasons why we wanted to join ZANLA. To our surprise we were treated very cordially, thus removing all false impressions about freedom fighters that had been fed to us by the puppet troops when we were in our village. All the fighters in this base were very young, most still in their teens, and very joyful and quite unwaried about the ponderous machinations of the so-called security forces. We were admitted into ZANLA, thus fulfilling our long and much awaited dream.
To our dismay, the comrades were reluctant to show us how to handle a gun. They were more interested in our grievances than in our interests to fight the boers or our unprecedented excitement over arms. Two weeks were therefore reserved for analyzing our grievances against the boers and the reasons why political understanding takes precedence over military action. After political education, the comrades introduced us to the rigors of the strategy and tactics of guerrilla warfare. This was the most fascinating part of the training since as women we felt pride in being able to tackle tasks which at home our village people regarded as men’s tasks.

A small ground was prepared for us to practice the handling of a gun and the tactics of guerrilla warfare. The male comrades lent us two pairs of trousers for the training. A sense of pride grew in us, being the only women in the camp of men and being in possession of a weapon. We moved proudly up and down the camp. The comrades soon realized this misconception within us and occasionally took our guns away from us. Before giving back our guns, they gave us lectures in correcting this political misunderstanding on our part.

One of the commissars told us: “A gun is not an object for you to use as an instrument of showing-off; neither is it a certificate that you are equal to men comrades. A gun is only for killing the fascist soldiers of Ian Smith and the eradication of racial discrimination, capitalism and exploitation in Zimbabwe. It will be given to someone who has the full understanding of the importance of the gun. Such a person deserves the title ‘SOLDIER OF THE PEOPLE.’”

We grasped more fully this point when one day we were included in a section of male comrades destined for an ambush along an enemy road. When enemy puppet troops returned our fire, their bullets whizzed past near my ears. The only thing for me was to open up my sub-machine gun and resolutely direct my fire towards the direction where the enemy was. To my relief, the enemy gave up after a few minutes of our fierce and concerted attack. Then I learned more of the use of my sub-machine gun. It’s either you kill the boer or the boer kills you. With more of such experiences in ZANLA we became more enlightened in our convictions and our freedom-bound duty.

In the new community of ZANLA, I was treated as an equal. We did the same tasks as male comrades. We performed patrol duties, carried war material, guarded our bases, and cooked in turns with our male comrades. We frequently given missions through villages and sneaked around boer military posts. Although such tasks were sometimes painstaking and tiresome, we enjoyed ourselves enormously because we always took comfort in the fact that we fought the boers when prepared and when we wanted and we received abundant support from the masses. We recruited more female comrades who have since swelled our ranks. We now have a ZANLA WOMEN’S DETACHMENT, which has been instrumental in sharpening our ideological thinking.

It is heartening to see the broad masses of women in Zimbabwe join ZANU and their male comrades in fighting against the racist government of Ian Smith. Women of Zimbabwe rise up and take part in social revolution. We are a decisive force in the success or failure of the Zimbabwe revolution.

PAMBERI NE CHIMURENGA
(FOREWARD WITH THE REVOLUTION)

From June 1974 Zimbabwe News
Zimbabwe Women

Zimbabwe women have an important role to play in the liberation of our motherland. We must all join the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) so that we can fight shoulder to shoulder with our male comrades in the noble task of liberating our country from the forces of traditionalism, colonialism, capitalism and imperialism.

You all know that there are about six million Africans in Zimbabwe today and that about half this number is composed of women. When we say that Zimbabweans are oppressed we mean that all the six million Zimbabweans, both men and women, are under the heavy yoke of the racist settlers. When we talk of the need for national liberation and independence we mean that all the African people of Zimbabwe, both men and women, need to be liberated. And when we say CHIMURENGA is the Zimbabwe People's War of Liberation we mean that it is a war for all our people, of both sexes. These facts have compelled us to make a direct appeal to you the great women of Zimbabwe so that you may realise your historical national duty and come forward to perform.

Throughout the world, particularly in capitalist and colonial countries, we hear of the talk of women's liberation. Even in Africa, the women have their own liberation organization—All Africa Women's Conference—which is about eleven years old. For most of the world the women are talking about the need to be liberated from the oppression imposed by men. This is due to a failure to analyse the situation facing them. But in socialist countries the women have the right end of the stick. They have critically analysed their situation and have come out with the right form of liberation. They have seen that women throughout the world are oppressed but not by men. They are oppressed by tradition and the capitalist system. This is the right end-product of a correct appraisal of the concrete situation women find themselves in.

As elsewhere throughout the world the women of Zimbabwe are oppressed by two great pillars: one is tradition and the other is colonialism. We have our own grievances apart from the national crimes committed against us by our racist enemy. For us there is actually a need for liberation. We will briefly here deal with some of our grievances. Since from early times our place in the African society has been in the home and to produce children. These duties have remained up to the present day.

Ours is an unenviable position. To any woman of Zimbabwe our role in these two areas of life cannot be dwelt upon for each and everyone of us is very familiar with it. It is not our men who are responsible for this. We were born, together with them, into this position and situation. It is our tradition which we have to struggle against and in changing it we will be changing also the men themselves. One other traditional concept which has been very oppressive to us is lobola (bride's price). We were and still are sold as items of trade. There is an element of bargaining similar to auctioneering as far as the bride's price is concerned. There are some exchanges on both sides till an agreement is reached. Anyone of us involved will remain mute and in some cases will be absent when the relatives are arguing it out with their sons-in-law. At the most we are only told what we are worth or have valued at. This leaves a scar on the life of any woman in our country.

When in trouble with our husbands we are always told that we have been bought. This leads many husbands to become inconsiderate and inhuman in their relations with us. They are victims of the situation just as we are. When we go to our parents for help in cases of our husbands having turned sour, we are always reminded that we are paid for and that our parents are old and cannot refund the lobola. It's very humiliating for us to see before us our parents pleading and almost begging us to bear the brutality of our husbands for their own financial sake. Such is our life as women, a life which has not improved but worsened with the passage of time.

Add to the above the question of forced marriage. In the past we did not have to choose husbands. They were given to us by our parents. In most cases the husbands were old men already polygamists. Even today in ZANLA we have female comrades who have had to run away from home because they were being given husbands they did not love.

With such parents and customs it is not love that matters but the friendship between Mr So-and-so's family and ours or a mere question of wealth. Even today many of us have been forced to marry people we love less rather than those we really love because they come from outside our parents' circle of friends or they were not wealthy enough to pay the great lobola the parents demanded. We have to remember that marriage is for a lifetime hence forced marriage means a life of oppressed love, emotions and even health.

Premature marriages are also very common. Some of us are already married before we are born. But even then some marry quite early for various reasons. Maybe a father is unavailable to look after the family; hence will try very hard to get the girls married in order to reduce the financial burden. Maybe a girl feels pity for the family and will get herself married in order to raise money for the lobola of her brother, her brother's school fees or just to escape a miserable life in a poor family.

ZANLA comrades preparing to vaccinate people against cholera (a disease brought to the war zone deliberately by rhodesian troops who polluted water wells.)

A member of the ZANLA Women's Detachment vaccinates a mother and her baby against cholera in ZANU operational zones
Here in ZANLA we have female comrades who for some of these reasons, married when they were about 11-13 years. These examples are enough to show us that we have to struggle against certain aspects of our traditions if we are to be really free. This does not mean that our culture is bad, no. There are very many aspects of it which are very good and these are worthy retaining. It is against retrogressive aspects of our tradition that we will have to struggle.

Also it does not mean that we are rebelling against our parents. No. In the course of struggling against these negative aspects of our tradition we will as a nation be also transformed by this struggle. We cannot carry it out as women alone. Even the men face some of the negative traits of our tradition and they too in collaboration with us will have to struggle against them. It is a national struggle with various sections.

Let us now turn to our most deadly enemy—CAPITALISM—personified in the present colonial set up in our country.

It is capitalism that has strengthened the traditional oppression on us apart from introducing its oppression on us. For example, because of increased lobola and the low wages for our parents and lovers, we are forced into marriage at an early age plus in some cases with people we only took as alternative lovers.

In the urban areas we find ourselves staying home except for a few of us who manage to get jobs. We are mere consumers in the family. We are embarrassed everytime because the money our husbands bring home is insufficient and whatever we do as parents we are always trying and struggling hard to maintain a face before our children, we do not want them to see that, as their parents we have failed to provide them with a better life.

We are even forced into prostitution in order to augment the miserable incomes of our husbands and parents. We know we are robbing other families of their livelihood but we cannot help it. Many families have broken as a result of prostitution but it is not any of our fault. It is because of blind capitalism which drives us into poor economic levels. It is very dehumanizing and humiliating for us to sell our bodies in order to make our family ends meet. Our bodies are the sacred fruits of our nation and this is what we have been forced to devalue with consequent result that we are despised as a nation. This is the most naked oppression the racist settlers have imposed on us.

In the rural areas we toil from dawn to dusk in poorly rewarding sandy, gravelly and stony soils which the notorious boers have decided to call "tribal trust lands". Our men are away in the urban areas (those areas of our country which the boers have designated white) where their labor is being exploited. They bring nothing from the urban areas that they can invest in the rural areas to improve our lot.

Actually, for us, the Zimbabweans, the rural areas have become concentration centres of forced labor camps for the African women. The only men are the very young and the very old. Our family life has been wrecked by this dual life—family-life form that capitalism in the form of the settler rule has imposed on us. And when the damned whites talk of our life in these areas they have driven us into they never talk of us as human beings. To them we are a nuisance to be rid of just as tsetse flies.

We have been forced into a miserable life in the rural areas and it is up to us as Zimbabwe women to struggle against this evil system that is destroying us gradually and making our live unworthy to live. We are only surviving because we have hope in the future and because we are a strong people. Other people have petered out under better conditions than ours. Let us put our fate into our hands and fight against this inhuman colonial system that is oppressing us.

We want to cite here another great injustice meted out to us as women. The regime, an illegal regime at that, does not recognize us, women, as people who have rights. For example, when our husbands die we are not treated as human beings. If it is in the urban areas we immediately lose our houses. We are told that we must go back to the rural areas and live with our relatives. Even if we are working we still have our houses snatched away from us. The racists even forget that some of us are completely urbanised. But they still pack us and post us to some rural area of their choice. The cases of widows struggling to maintain their families are well known in all the urban areas.

But, dear comrades, when a white man dies the wife remains with the husband’s house. She has a choice in whatever she wants to do with it. But this right is not for us, merely for the fact that we are African women.

In the rural areas the widows still fare poorly. When our husbands die we are immediately forced to pay tax for the fields and the acreage is reduced. We fail to send our children to school. This never happens to white widows. They are well looked after by the regime and their children are educated by the illegal regime. But we are made to suffer as if we are responsible for our husbands’ deaths. This is merely because we are black women.

Most of us women are in the rural areas and it is here that most of our children are born. When we are pregnant we have very few clinics and hospitals in the rural areas to go to for advice and medical check up. The few that exist are council clinics built with our own money. But when we go there we are asked to pay $2.00 at least and in urban areas we pay $10.00. On top of this we will need money to buy special food like soft drinks and fruits. We will also need money for the baby’s clothing and for transport to get there.

We do not work and even if we want to work there is no employment available for us. Our husbands work for meagre wages. The result of all this is that we do not deliver our babies in clinics or hospitals. We deliver them at home and they receive no medical check-up. The result is that our children are always ill and we, mothers, have unpleasant lives due to worrying over the health of our children. It is for this reason that the government to provide hospitals and clinics but the regime of Ian Smith is just not interested in us. It only speeds up its birth control campaign which is a political strategy to reduce the African population.

In ZANU operational zones in the Northwest, North, Northeast and East of Zimbabwe, we have noted with pleasant pleasure our women and male comrades looking after the women and children. It has even been included in ZANU’s Political Programme that special attention be paid to women and children and this is being done in the areas ZANU Armed Forces (ZANLA) operate. ZANU is a liberation movement and its resources are very limited, but it tries its best to look after our welfare, particularly that of our children for these children are the future nation of Zimbabwe.
What a contrast with the Smith regime which tries to exterminate us slowly through the denial of medical facilities. The situation is worsened by the fact that the regime has pushed us into the remote unhealthy parts of the country such as in the Lowveld and the Zambezi Valley—the least developed areas and rampant with disease.

Let us take the Dande region as an example. People here have known what it means to live with grief and sorrow. About three-quarters of children here die before the age of seven. There are more dead than living members in most families. We challenge the Smith regime to deny this. This is wanton destruction of our lives by the corrupt racist regime and the greatest grief falls on us women as mothers. We can only change this situation by taking up arms and drive out the white settlers from our country. Anything short of the total control of political state-power by us, the owners of Zimbabwe, will not help us. This is our duty as the women of Zimbabwe.

Economically we are also generally oppressed. Not very many jobs are open to us. We suffer from job reservation as do our men. The only jobs open to us are the very lowly which are for the “less-beings” such as being housegirls, nannies, etc. Those jobs which are open to us like nursing have so many restrictions in them. Actually there are few posts available after we have completed the courses and once we are married we face the loss of jobs. There are so many trained mistresses who have lost their teaching posts because they happened to have been married and had to go on maternity leave.

The jobs that are for women are all taken up by white women and we are left with nothing in our hands. Even those girls with the necessary qualifications such as nursing are without jobs because of racial segregation. You find Rhodesia looking for nurses from outside the country to come and fill vacant positions in European hospitals while many African nurses are unemployed. They are left aside because they are black.

Many girls who have left schools are unemployed and they eagerly await marriage as the other alternative. This life is foreign to our white counterparts. As for those of us who manage to get jobs the wages are miserably low that we only work to survive or we survive to work. Also our working conditions are poor. We are scolded, beaten and made bed-partners if we happen to work in the whites’ houses. We have long hours of hard working with poor food and working conditions. In urban areas we are made to stay in women hostels where relatives and friends can only see us at the gate.

On the farms we work long hours with children on our backs even if it is raining for the boers say everybody on the farm must work. If our children die we are told to leave them in the house and go and work. Some other people will bury them for us. What a miserable and naked oppression this is!

There are more schools for boys than there are girls' in the country today. There are few girls in primary, secondary, technical schools and in the University. All this is aimed at immobilising our nation through making us, the women of the nation, permanently ignorant. A nation with half its people ignorant is an ignorant nation. And to this add that over half our males also do not go to school and then you can understand our plight.

This is in direct contrast to the white settlers. Their girls and women are well educated. There are many of their girls in high schools and even at the university. They are active in their community because of their education. We are denied of education because of our strategic political role. We must refuse to be denied our right and take up the challenge. We must be prepared to fight and die for our rights. If we are human beings as indeed we are we must then refuse to be relegated to a level of non-beings who can be denied their rights with impunity. Now is the time for us to rise and state our position even if it means doing it through the force of arms and indeed this is the only effective way we can use under our present circumstances.
Women at a ZANLA supplies base in the operational zone carrying war materials to the frontline, a role that is as crucial as the actual firing of the gun in combat against enemy forces.

If our husbands are working in urban areas we are not allowed to stay with them except for the few with married quarters and here the conditions of living are very bad for the police can throw you out of bed any time—we are all familiar with the police night raids. And in some cases you have to sleep in the same bedroom the whole family. Can we wonder when our children begin to lose their morals and disrespect us?

We could go on to cite many examples of our grievances as women but we think these are enough to motivate anyone among us who has a mind and self respect to start doing something for herself and for the women and nation of Zimbabwe. We have seen that the racist regime is oppressing us and this is one thing that is very clear. The regime will never stop oppressing us of its own accord. We cannot expect the fascist white settlers to wake up one day very reasonable indeed and say that they are going to end this oppression. This would be wishful thinking on our part. The fascists can only be forced to end this oppression and the people who can force them to do so are us, the Zimbabwe women and men.

This oppression will only stop when political state power has been taken away from the hands of the boers and put into the hands of the Africans. This can only be done through armed struggle. The Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) has shown us the way of ending this oppression and is showing us the way—CHIMURENGA—through practice. Let us today all the women of Zimbabwe heed ZANU’s call to our nation and come out to fight the settlers with all our might.

We, the women of Zimbabwe, are not the only sector of our population that is oppressed. We are oppressed as a nation. We cannot solve our own grievances as women alone. No. Our grievances are part of the national grievances of the six million Zimbabweans. The only way of changing this situation in which we find ourselves oppressed as a nation is to fight the illegal regime of Ian Smith; it is the way of People’s War—CHIMURENGA. Only a national struggle led by a true revolutionary Party can liberate us. We have these two things already—CHIMURENGA and ZANU. What is left is for each one of you to come forward and play your historic roles. We are already at our posts but yours is still vacant. Will you take up the challenge now and come forward to perform your role?

Even as long ago as about 1896 the Zimbabwe women realised that they were oppressed and when the national liberation war—THE FIRST CHIMURENGA—broke out in that year the Zimbabwe women joined the war. Some of them became national heroes. The case of Mbuya Nehanda is well known to all of us. She was a gallant Freedom Fighter and defied the enemy up to the gallows. But she was a woman just as we are. We can do the same today.

Throughout the world women are joining their men to fight for their liberation. They are fighting in Vietnam, Cambodia, Guinea-Bissau, Angola and in neighbouring Mozambique and INSIDE ZIMBABWE ITSELF, and they fought in Korea, China, etc. Even the white settler women and their children are being taught combat to fight against us. They are also being engaged in war—supply departments to bolster up their reactionary war effort. We too must fight for our national liberation and independence. You are already late in joining ZANLA Forces. Your friends and fellow women are already actively engaging the enemy in combat.

Our revolutionary Party, ZANU, says there is room for everybody in the national struggle. ZANU has a women section, apart from the ZANLA Women Detachment, the Zimbabwe African Women’s Brigade. We can become members of it and through it become militants—thus becoming members of the Detachment of Women, a section of ZANU. ZANU has everything you need for use in the struggle. It is only awaiting your arrival. Today is the day for you to make a decision. Today is the day for you to come forward and be with us, your sisters and daughters who are already in the bush of our country. The struggle, our great CHIMURENGA, needs you in its various sections, e.g. as militants, nurses, teachers, representatives abroad, etc. This is our struggle. Now is the time for us the women of Zimbabwe to come forward and play our historic role in the struggle and in the laying of the foundations of our future nation. THE STRUGGLE NEEDS YOU! ZIMBABWE NEEDS YOU TODAY!

from May, 1974, Zimbabwe News

PAMBERI NE CHIMURENGA
( FORWARD WITH THE REVOLUTION )
"Our Women Are Women of Action"

Comrade Teurai Ropa, ZANU's Secretary for Women Affairs

Comrade Teurai Ropa (her name means "Spill blood"), 23, ZANU's fire-eating Secretary for Women Affairs and in her own right a seasoned guerilla, symbolizes the level of ideological and revolutionary development that has taken place in ZANU during the 15 years of the party's history. As a member of the National Executive and The Central Committee of ZANU - the highest Policy Organs directing the Zimbabwe Revolution, she articulates the role of Women in the revolution more effectively than anybody can. Recently, Zimbabwe News sought an interview with the young chief of all Zimbabwean Women and elicited the following highly explosive comments.

Zimbabwe News: What kind of Zimbabwean women are joining the struggle for the liberation of their motherland? Why do they join?

Comrade Teurai Ropa: The women who have joined the struggle represent the groups from young girls to grandmothers. We have women who have little education to women who studied at the University. Like our menfolk, the women who join come from all walks of life. Because our Party is a Party with a mass following, our membership is representative of the masses from whom we come.

One thing all these women have in common is the desire to liberate their motherland, because they know that only through true liberation can the condition of women improve in Zimbabwe. At present women in Zimbabwe suffer many disadvantages like all Zimbabweans, they suffer because they are exploited by the imperialist-backed settler regime. This means shortage of land, extremely low wages (as low as ten dollars per month), back-breaking working conditions, very bad living conditions, few opportunities for educational improvement, few medical facilities, malnutrition etc. Women also suffer from the added disadvantages of being a symbol of prestige and are often treated by men as little better than a commodity. This is a problem faced by women in all capitalist countries and Zimbabwean women are fighting hard to be treated as full human beings rather than objects of pleasure or tools for labour. A further problem faced by Zimbabwean women is that of feudal oppression where women are subjected to the authority of their husbands and are hardly ever free people in their rights. In all these ways women are fighting to liberate themselves and to improve their condition. It is for this reason that they joined the revolutionary struggle for the total liberation of Zimbabwe, for only in the struggle do they see the chance of achieving their aims.

Zimbabwe News: Is the concept of women's liberation in Zimbabwe in par-
Revolution liberates men and women's minds
ticular and in Africa in general different
from the concept of women's liberation
in the USA and in the West?
Comrade Teurai Ropa: The women's
liberation movement in the West differs
in many ways from our own. In the
West, women's liberation is closely as-
sociated with educated middle class
women rather than with the masses. In
Zimbabwe our liberation struggle by its
nature starts from grassroots with a
strong foundation among peasants and
working class women. This difference in
class base naturally means fundamental
difference in ideological orientations.
Our struggle therefore is different and
definitely linked with the overall
struggle to eliminate the capitalist sy-
stem of exploitation.

Zimbabwe News: What about the role
of women in politicizing the masses in
the Zimbabwe struggle?
Comrade Teurai Ropa: Women have
played a key role in mobilising the mas-
es in Zimbabwe. At first our Party had
problems convincing the masses that we
could win against the settler regime with
their seemingly all powerful Nazi army
and police everywhere ready to crush
the slightest sign of revolution. But once
we had won the confidence of women-
folk it became much easier to win sup-
port from the masses. Menfolk were as-
hamed to see women fight against the
Nazi regime of Ian Smith when they
themselves were too afraid to take up
the gun against the enemy. Thus the
mobilisation of women into our struggle
as soldiers, leaders, social workers and
medical personnel has furthered our
struggle tremendously.

Zimbabwe News: The enemy has of-
ten accused freedom fighters of exploi-
ting their women folk: What are your
comments on this?
Comrade Teurai Ropa: Because we
come from a capitalist society where ex-
ploration is the way of life. It would be
surprising if we were not infected by the
sort of mental and emotional state of
mind which is formed by exploitation.
Exploitation in all its forms is not only
the exploitation of the labour of the
masses to create surplus value to enrich
the few capitalists, but also includes the
exploitation and manipulation of people
for the benefit of the few. This later in-
cludes sexual exploitation where wo-
men are used and manipulated and are
treated as property. Naturally we are
also struggling to free ourselves from
this aspect of exploitation.

This is part of our own mental and
emotional liberation which forms a part
of the total struggle to liberate Zimbab-
we. So we can say that the foundation of
our struggle is the armed struggle, we
expect to free our country primarily by
force of arms because we know that with-
out the armed struggle we can never
be free. In addition to the same armed
struggle we have the economic and ide-
ological struggles, both of which are
indispensable to true liberation. We can
see the question of the exploitation of
women as part of the armed struggle,
the economic and ideological struggle.
As women participate in military war-
fare to free themselves they will cease to
allow themselves to be exploited. As
they participate in economic liberation
they will win the economic liberation
and will win the economic indepen-
dence to make it unnecessary for them
to depend on the whims of others for a
livelihood. And most important of all
the ideological struggle will enable wo-
men to understand their situation and
how to improve it.

"Remember, as the new year has ope-
ned, a most favourable terrain has
emerged with the new season. The
enemy is frightened, he is in disarray
and completely resigned to defeat.
This is no moment to slacken our ef-
forts. Let us hammer him to defeat.
Let us blow up his citadel. Let us give
him no rest. Let us chase him in
every corner. Let us rid our home of this
settler Vermin."

Mugabe
The Emancipation Of Women And Their Role Towards Liberation Struggle

In recent years "womens emancipation" has been very much in vogue in the Western world and with it the role that women can play in society. Though sometimes the talk of the emancipation of women is no more than a jeu d'esprit, for those waging wars of liberation in colonized and oppressed societies, "emancipation of women" and the role that emancipated women should play in their society are questions of fundamental importance.

No revolution can claim to be successful if more than half of the exploited and oppressed people, i.e. women are not liberated. Indeed for it to be victorious the revolution must of necessity involve the women. A thorough analysis of the position of women in colonised and oppressed societies will show that the starting point of the exploitation of women and their consequent oppression lies in the system of private ownership of the means of production.

From the time of primitive communism when the prevailing mode of production changed and early man started to produce more than he consumed conditions were laid for the emergence of a class of a handful of people in society who would appropriate the fruits of the majority's labour. Already at that time in an agrarian economy men ceased to be the main productive forces and the dominant labour force in the productive process was women who tilled the land and looked after the household chores while men were released from their main occupation – that of hunting.

In such an economy the possession of women meant the possession of unpaid workers, who apart from producing free labour were also a source of pleasure and producers of more workers. Excessive emphasis was placed on women's fertility; a husband has a right to disown his wife if he thought she was barren. The woman was fetishised like any other instrument – to be bought with a 'dowry' (lobola) and to be used according to the whims of her buyer, the husband.

This exploitative man / woman relationship is still rampant today in many areas of Africa. Women do the heaviest work, they cultivate the land, carry water from long distances, carry produce to markets look after the cattle as well as bring up their families and produce handicrafts. The dominant ideology and culture in society, that is the ideology and culture of the ruling class, obscurantism, superstition and ignorance are used to stifle womens initiative and reduce them to passivity and servility.

This treatment is also meted out to the workers and peasants – which means that apart from the specificity of the womens situation, the antagonistic contradiction is not between women and men, but between women and the rest of the workers, on the one hand, and the private ownership of the means of production on the other.

As Samora Machel, President of Mozambique said "Men and women are products and victims of the exploitative..."
society, which has created and formed them". This antagonistic contradiction can only be solved by revolutionary means — for the revolution to triumph in its totality, there must be emancipation of women. Women will never be emancipated without a victorious working class led revolution.

How can the transition from "enslavement" to "emancipation" be effected? Some have vulgarised the concept of women's emancipation by seeing it as a mere mechanical equality between men and women. But the concept of women's liberation rests on a number of precepts, which require women to enter the political milieu and mobilise their grievances into political struggle.

By releasing the productive forces and raising scientific and cultural education women can destroy the myths nurtured by obscurantism. Women will only be emancipated when they can participate at all levels of planning and decision-making.

The realization of this objective will depend on the linking of women's struggle with wars of liberation. The relationship between men and women should cease to be based on the supposed superiority of man, a myth aimed at satisfying the male ego. The love between the sexes must be a love between free and equal people with the same aspirations of serving the toiling masses.

Today, Chimurenga (the liberation war) prosecuted by ZANU has seen the emergence of a new type of Zimbabwean woman, free from the servant mentality of the communal / feudal society and from the slave mentality of colonialism. The new Zimbabwean woman would have to liberate herself entirely from the chains which bound her to life of depravity and degradation. Through her part in the struggle, fighting with the bazooka in her hand, working side by side sharing the burden of labour equally with her man, the Zimbabwean woman of today would have transformed herself from a slave to a free woman who can hold her head up proudly. Her influence in society will be constructive, creative and beautiful. For the Zimbabwean woman abroad, who claim to be the educated elite, must first of all be freed from the bureaucratic 'anti-traditional' thinking inherited from a colonial situation in which administrators from a foreign and bourgeois culture tried to come to terms with African society. Their lack of aspiration of serving the toiling masses is unbelievable and yet emancipated women should have a role to play in anything pertaining to liberation struggle.

Emancipated women, mothers and even grandmothers, have a role to play side by side with young women and men in liberation struggles. With the sharpening of the liberation struggle, Frelimo in Mozambique mobilised and organised Mozambican women, involving them in the midst of their struggle, instead of just leaving them on the periphery. By so doing the revolution has resulted in the liberation of women.

'Chimurenga' (the liberation war) has brought a dramatic and exciting change in the role of women in Zimbabwe. Since the formation of a women wing of ZANLA, resulting in the full and active participation of women in the struggle, there has been a noticeable change in the Revolution. The ordinary workers and peasants of Zimbabwe have been inspired to greater commitment to Chimurenga by the great sacrifices made by our women comrades. Young peasant girls, school girls, women from all walks of life have rushed to join ZANLA. This wonderful phenomenon has been whole heartedly welcomed by all revolutionary comrades and the revolutionary masses of Zimbabwe and marks a great victory for the revolution. It is only through the revolution that they will be able to liberate themselves completely.

In Zimbabwe, both black women and men are employed skilfully to propagate anti-guerilla activities. Zimbabwe is heavily bombarded and blitzed with differing ideologies, propaganda, opinions, viewpoints advice and all the universal rubbish. Zimbabweans should refuse to be used as uncle toms for the Smith regime. Women should concentrate on helping the full mobilization of resources within the country for the purpose of training themselves, not only in their role as mothers, responsible for child bearing, but also in their role in various fields.

As history enters the era of the 1980s our liberation struggle will be more pronounced and in the process more women will inevitably become emancipated.

M.M. ZANU
London

"We have said, we are committed to scientific socialism, but of course, we also accept that the application of scientific socialism depends on the historical circumstances and the actual existing situation in any particular country. I mean our country has its own history, it has got its own peculiar circumstances which make it different from any other and these have got to be taken into account in the application of any principles of scientific socialism." Comrade Mugabe

"Yes, we are Marxists/Leninists. The main principles of socialism do not vary but the application varies. In our particular circumstances you have about five million people in the rural areas. They constitute the peasantry and about one million in urban and other areas and you have got to take into account their own customs, the economic situation which has been established by the settlers of the country and you can't over night you see, bring an overhand to the situation."
Women Have Total Involvement in Struggle

Comrade Chairwoman:

On behalf of my Party, ZANU, I would like to thank you for the invitation you have extended to ZANU, the vanguard of the Zimbabwe Revolution, to take part in this important International meeting on the 8th Congress of the Women's Union of Albania.

I would also like to convey to you Revolutionary salutations from our President Comrade Robert Mugabe, our Central Committee, our High Command, our General staff and the backbone of our Revolution, the gallant ZANLA forces, especially the women's brigade of ZANLA forces.

It is a great pleasure for us to be here in this small but great country, great because of the heroic struggle that the freedom loving people have been waging to protect their hard won independence and to build socialism. Not so long ago I saw a film on the role that the Albanian women played in the fight against the Nazis. I then realized the common denominator between the Zimbabwean women and the Albanian women in the struggle.

So we come to learn from your magnificent example and to share our humble experiences with you over the decades, spreading into the last century when marauding bandits from South Africa invaded our country and asserted their wicked oppressive machinery because of superior arms.

Comrade Chairwoman, allow us to dwell for sometime on the role that women-folk have been playing alongside their men-folk in the National Liberation struggle in our country, Zimbabwe. For clarity the role of the Zimbabwe women in the Revolution has to be treated in a historical context. The advent of colonialism created serious problems for the women in Zimbabwe. Because of the cruelty and individual selfishness of colonial capitalist exploitation the Zimbabwean women have been suffering double exploitation. They have been suppressed by bureaucratic Zimbabwean men and even more viciously, they have been exploited and oppressed by colonialists.

The exploitation of Zimbabwean women by Zimbabwean men was based on the highly patriarchal social structures in which women were regarded as minors whilst men were regarded as majors. Thus women were paid for in lobola (bride price) in marriage, they had no right to guardianship over children who were regarded as man's property. Indeed women were often considered as part of the man's household effects.

What colonialism brought to Zimbabweans was an increase of the exploitation of women both qualitatively and quantitatively. Under colonialism women have suffered as much as their menfolk. They have been arrested, harassed, tortured, raped, sentenced to long prison sentences and hanged. Even worse our women-folk have been abused by lusty racist sex maniacs and given children against their will. It is sad to point out that this is the origin of much of the coloured community in Zimbabwe. It is important for us to state that we are not against proper inter-marriages but the origin of the mixed race community marks a shameful era of colonial history in our country.

Chimurenga, the Revolutionary armed struggle in Zimbabwe, has opened up a new era for the Zimbabwean women. It has also been a wonderful eye-opener for the backward and feudal-minded male chauvinists. While it is true that in a Revolutionary situation, especially in a colonial country, it is often easy for men to fight against imperialist exploitation while unconsciously maintaining the domination of women, the hard realities of our struggle since 1966 have forced the Zimbabwean Revolutionaries to analyse the question of the women's role in our Revolution very concretely. Indeed a Revolutionary armed struggle in a colonial country is one of the good tests of a genuine revolution. Under such conditions it is easy to find out if one stands for liberation from colonialism and capitalist exploitation only or whether he stands for the emancipation of women as well. No society which exploits half of its people could even consider itself free, least of all aspire to the noble cause of building socialism.

The revolutionary armed struggle has been the biggest blessing for the Zimbabwean women. Within a few years it opened doors which would probably have taken decades to loosen. The struggle for National independence has opened our women-folk to a world even they would not have dreamt of. The need for each other, the need for manpower to perform a variety of important Revolutionary tasks, have shown that once given the opportunity to unlock her creative talents, a woman, like any exploited and oppressed person, is capable of performing heroic and magnificent feats.

Today the Zimbabwean women is giving more than her fair share for the cause of freedom. National Independence and self-determination. Gone are the days when all women did was to sew,
knit, cook, commiserate with and mourn for their fallen soldiers. Now they too participate in the fighting, they too face the music. Our Revolution has reached a stage where physical force is not a passport to a superior position but mental power and other abilities are important and complement the physical encounter with the enemy. Our women’s brigade is involved in every sphere of the armed revolutionary struggle. Their involvement is total. In the frontline they transport war-materials to the battlefield and as often happens, are often forced to fight their way through enemy territory to reach our fighters. They do politisation work among the masses – this can often be very dangerous especially in virgin areas, where our cadres do not know the people properly. They cook food and care for wounded Comrades. They teach the masses how to produce war materials and carry out intelligence reports behind enemy lines. With the collapse of the enemy’s administrative machinery in many parts of the country under the weight of our thrust, women Comrades, together with their menfolk, are reconstructing a new social order. They are engaged in administration, health work, production and construction, educational work etc.

At the rear our women Comrades’ tasks are even more extensive. They are involved in the work of every department of our Party, ZANU. They work as commanders, military instructors, commissars, medical corps, teachers, drivers, mechanics, cooks, in logistic and supplies, Information and Publicity, as administrative cadres. There is no department, where their beneficial presence is not felt.

Women Comrades are represented at every level of our organisation from the National Executive, through the Central Committee, High Command, General Staff, down to every level of the ZANLA-forces.

There can be no doubt, that the Zimbabwean women have stood up. We have won our rights and place in the Revolution not by anyone’s pity, but through our own determination, devotion, and bravery in our Chimurenga. To be fair, however, we owe a lot to our progressive male Comrades, who have stood by us, fought for our rights, allowed us the degree of freedom to contribute to the best of our abilities for the National cause.

We, the Zimbabwean women in struggle are the heirs of Mbuya Nehanda, that Revolutionary heroine, who inspires every Zimbabwean woman with feelings of great patriotism. Mbuya Nehanda was an exemplary freedom fighter during the first Chimurenga. She fought gallantly and refused to give in to the colonialists. Although the racist colonialists executed her by hanging her at the gallows in what is now known as Salisbury's Maximum Security Prison in 1897, her spirit is still fresh in the minds of many Zimbabwean women. Her exemplary heroism is the spirit that guides every Revolutionary Zimbabwean. Her spirit lives forever.

Since we are people, who are still struggling for freedom, I have nothing to present as a gift from our Party. With the impression I have had from the congress, I would like to sing a song which shows that the First Secretary of the Labour Party, Comrade Enver Hoxha, and our Party, ZANU, led by President Robert Mugabe, are together.

Song: Long live Comrade Hoxha
Long live Comrade Hoxha
we shall remember.
Long live Comrade Hoxha.
Rest in Peace, Martyrs of Albania
We shall never forget
Rest in peace, Martyrs of Albania.
We shall ever remember.
Establishment Of Women's Centre
Submitted by ZANU's Department of Women's Affairs

The decision to set up a Women's Centre was made at ZANU's first Women's Seminar which was held in Mozambique in May 1979 and attended by more than 300 delegates. The aim of the Centre is to develop the skills and talents of women in preparation for the task of national reconstruction in which they are expected to play a vital role. ZANU's Department of Women's Affairs which will implement the project has rented a large house and farm in Matola on the outskirts of Maputo, Mozambique. This will serve as a pilot centre for similar centres which will be located in the liberated areas of Zimbabwe.

The Matola Centre will offer six-month courses which are initially intended for the 1,000 women who presently staff the refugee camps and are working in the liberated areas. Many of them have not had the opportunity of a formal education. Therefore, the programme will combine general education and vocational training and will include the following:

1. Adult Education - Classes will be given in Shona, Sindebele, English, arithmetic, history, politics and geography.
2. Home Economics - Practical training will be given in nutrition, hygiene, cookery, budgeting and sewing.
3. Clinic - Training in midwifery, childcare and first aid will be offered.
4. Vocational Training - There will be an emphasis on vocational and technical training which will include carpentry, agriculture, animal husbandry, basketry, beadwork, carving, leatherwork, pottery, masonry, shoe-making, tailoring, toymaking, knitting and crocheting.
5. Creche [Childcare Center] - The creche will enable women with children to attend the courses and will be a model for the establishment of creches in an independent Zimbabwe.
6. Shop - A small cooperative store will be set up at the Centre where the women can buy personal supplies such as soap, combs, etc. The shop will also sell the handicrafts made by the women and the profits will help to make the Centre self-supporting.
7. Recreation - The women will participate in sports, games and cultural activities.
8. Agriculture - Since women do much of the farming in rural Zimbabwe, the Centre includes a model farm where they can learn modern agricultural methods and animal husbandry. Already the staff of the Centre are raising chickens, rabbits and pigs and growing fruits and vegetables. The farm will provide most of the food used by the Centre.

Needs

The Centre is still in an embryonic stage and a full list of requirements has not been drawn up, but the following have been cited as the immediate needs:

Adult Education - pencils, pens, notebooks, rulers, maps and atlases
Home Economics - sewing machines (10), soap, cooking pots, plates, pressing irons, basic budgeting textbooks
Creche - mattresses, blankets, toys, learning aids (plastic, wood)
Crafts - dyes, knitting machines (10), crochet hooks, wool, thread
Administration - filing cabinet, chairs, desk

Comments

Sister Janice McLaughlin visited the Women's Centre many times and watched its rapid development over the five-week period she was in Mozambique. The first crop of vegetables was already being harvested when she left and pigs, chickens and rabbits had been bought. The core of teachers had been recruited and were preparing their lesson plans in preparation for the first intake of 15 students. Some women were already busy making clothes and sweaters for the babies and young children in the refugee camps.

The Zimbabwe Project made an initial small grant of 300 Pounds [about $600 US] to purchase some of the most urgent items and a trip was made to Swaziland to buy the goods.

ZANU has chosen this project as one of their top priorities.
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
(November 1979)

Premises

The first Women's Centre is being housed in already existing buildings in Matola, outside of Maputo. The only cost involved is the monthly rent of approximately 100 Pounds and a few repairs and additions. Future plans include setting up additional centres in the liberated areas of Zimbabwe but these too are intended to be located in already existing buildings.

Personnel

A staff of 23 runs the Centre. This includes 6 administrators who are also responsible for administering ZANU's entire Department of Women's Affairs; 6 teachers, 3 secretaries, 2 drivers, 2 security guards, 3 cooks. All of these staff members provide their services free of charge. Additional volunteer personnel also come regularly to help with the farm. The director is Teurai Ropa, ZANU's Secretary for Women's Affairs.

Training of Staff

There are plans to send women for training in the following fields:

- adult literacy, DELTA course in Kenya - 12
- child care/nursery schools, Zambia or Kenya - 10
- animal husbandry, Kenya - 2

Research is being conducted into the most appropriate courses available in Africa.
## BUDGET

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Build the ZANU Women’s Campaign! Support the ZANU Women’s League!

An Interview with Joyce Kangai, Publicity Secretary of the ZANU Women’s League, US Branch

This interview with Joyce Kangai, Publicity Secretary of the ZANU Women’s League, US Branch, was done by the Material Aid Campaign for ZANU on February 13, 1980 in New York City.

Q. For the past sixteen years the Zimbabwean people, under ZANU’s leadership, have waged armed struggle to reclaim their country. We understand it is the people’s war that forced the British to negotiate the ceasefire, and people’s war that will insure the transfer of power to the Zimbabwean people. Can you speak to the role of Zimbabwean women in the overall struggle for liberation?

A. It is true, people’s war brought Britain to negotiate with ZANU and the other parties. They tried a so-called internal settlement with Muzorewa; they saw it wouldn’t work, because Muzorewa wouldn’t stop the war. They realized which force was powerful and had the Zimbabwean people’s support. That’s why the London conference was called.

From the beginning, Zimbabwean women have been involved with the vanguard party of the Zimbabwean revolution, ZANU. We have struggled from just being cooks in the camps, and doing work women are supposed to do, until we have proved we could also hold a gun and fight for our country. So ZANU women have been fighting throughout the struggle.

Besides fighting the enemy, ZANU women have struggled within the party, and in Zimbabwe, since ZANU is the majority party. We have had improvements: right now, within the party, there is almost complete equality of everybody, regardless of sex. In the armed forces 10,000 trained women are fighting. Quite a number of women are in the Central Committee of ZANU. Recently, the Central Committee chose delegates to stand for parliamentary elections. We have about 12 women delegates out of 80. (I’m not sure of the exact number.) From the hard work ZANU women have been doing, we are seeing results.

Q. What does the slogan “Liberation through Participation” mean?

A. ZANU women adopted this slogan because we realized that in order to be liberated, we had to show we have the right to this country. And if we have the right to the country, we have to participate in the national independence struggle. This slogan started because women started joining the armed struggle. We realized if we wanted to get anywhere, we had to show our men we can do something for our country. Then they can understand women are just as good as them.

The things I mentioned before, when you asked about women’s participation, have come through this participation. If women had not participated in this struggle for national independence, maybe we would have no women in the Central Committee or standing for the elections.

Q. We know the reality of imperialist oppression on Zimbabwean women, as it has been on all African and Third World women, is genocide. What were the lives of women like in Zimbabwe before colonialism? How has the oppression of Zimbabwean women been transformed by colonialism and imperialism?

A. The lives of women before colonialism were not satisfactory, but they were much better than they are now. Opposition before colonialism was due to traditional laws, and wasn’t as intensive. When the settlers came to Zimbabwe and introduced this capitalist society, women’s lives became more miserable. They introduced the so-called “Tribal Trust Lands” — where we were supposed to stay while the men worked for the Europeans in the cities — attempting to separate African families.

They came up with so-called “birth control.” The means they used were practically sterilization. They introduced drugs never used in Western countries, because they understood their danger, and used them on Zimbabwean women. About 25 percent of the women who took one such drug are now sterile.

I remember one time they introduced what they called a vaccine against a virus which claimed a lot of African lives. A lot of children died from that vaccine. When Western pharmaceutical companies introduce drugs, they send them to Third World countries for trial.

They have tried to reduce the African population in Zimbabwe by, I can say, murder. Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of State here, claimed whites are there to stay in Rhodesia and South Africa. So this land, which didn’t belong to anybody, was reserved for white people. They were planning to have a lot of immigrants come to Rhodesia from Western countries and stop the increasing African population. So to that extent they committed a lot of genocide.
Also, because of the war, claiming they were in pursuit of guerillas, they have bombed villages, killed people, innocent civilians, for nothing. They have gone into refugee camps and massacred thousands of people at one time in an attempt to reduce the African population.

Q. The ZANU Women's League had its first conference in May, 1979. What were the goals of that conference?

A. That was the first such conference within ZANU. There were many goals: more participation of women in the struggle, improvement of conditions for women in ZANU, improvement of conditions for women in the liberated zones, for example.

Because of colonialism a lot of women didn't get the chance to get education. Many skilled women in Zimbabwe didn't have the chance to share their skill. So one goal was to set up schools, adult schools, in Mozambique for the refugees and in the liberated zones in Zimbabwe. These women's centers are technical schools for women who had no previous chance for any kind of training. They offer courses in every field you can think of -- engineering, cookery, sewing, the health field, nursing. So far, one such center has been started in Maputo, Mozambique. We want to continue building these women's centers. This is one of the most important struggles, for women to have these things. At every center there will be a childcare center, so any woman who wants to attend can. To be productive in reconstructing our country, we need a lot of skills. These centers will train women in different skills so we can also participate in the reconstruction of our country.

Q. The women's centers are a more recent focus of the ZANU Women's Campaign. Could you please describe the full scope of the ZANU Women's Campaign?

A. The Campaign also includes raising needs for women -- sanitary napkins, bras, underwear, things like that. In the past we have gotten material aid from the US, but these things were principally clothes, mostly clothes for men. Things women really need we could not raise in any other way. So we decided to have a separate campaign for women, raising specifically these needs.

Even after the elections, the campaign will continue; we still have many refugees, and it's going to take some time to resettle them. We'll still be responsible for the refugees. The campaign for sanitary napkins will continue. At the same time, the campaign to build more women's centers in Zimbabwe will continue.

Another campaign as a result of our May 1979 conference is to improve our working relationships with other women's groups in the US, to try to educate each other and define who our real enemy is. We in ZANU understand we all have the same enemy, imperialism, and we can have a basis of combined effort to defeat this imperialism.

Q. What role can women in this country play to build support for the ZANU Women's Campaign?

A. Women in the US can do a lot. As I said, we have to have a common understanding to work together. We have to all be anti-imperialists. From that basis, we can have a clear understanding on how we are going to work together.

Women in this country can support the ZANU Women's League by protesting the pharmaceutical companies committing genocide on Zimbabwean women -- trying to compile information on the dangers, advantages and disadvantages of different drugs, especially birth control devices, so this can be at the disposal of so many Zimbabwean women as possible. This is one thing for US women in the medical field.

You can arrange speaking engagements where ZANU members can speak, explaining the nature of the struggle. You can raise material support, as I mentioned before. And women should support the Zimbabwean struggle as a whole, not only the women's campaign.
"Women Are Part and Parcel of the Revolution and Part and Parcel of Zimbabwe"

The following is an interview with Teurai Ropa Nhongo, who was Commander of the ZANLA Women's Detachment and head of the ZANU Women's League, and shortly after this interview was conducted, was named Minister of Youth, Sports and Recreation of the Republic of Zimbabwe.

The interview was conducted on March 3, 1980 in Salisbury, Zimbabwe by a delegation from the revolutionary movement in the US -- representatives from the Afrikan Peoples Party, the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika, the Black Acupuncture Advisory Association of North America and May 19th Communist Organization. The delegation went to Zimbabwe during the campaign and elections as international observers in solidarity with ZANU(PF). They spoke with leaders and members of ZANU(PF), freedom fighters, women leaders and commanders and people throughout Zimbabwe to gain insight into how the struggle for independence has transformed the people and society and what the tasks are that lie ahead.

Q. What was the role of women during Chimurenga?

A. Most women thought that the women should fight together with the men, and that we should be part and parcel of the Zimbabwe Revolution, so most of us were involved in the fighting. And since we were political soldiers, most of us were political instructors. Also, since we had quite a big group of small children who were running from the country, we found out that it was good to send these small children to school, so most of us were made educational instructors and some were helping the comrades cook. Most of us were transporters of war materials. So in every activity which was being carried out in ZANU, every person was being encouraged to do it. Because our culture was promoting men instead of women, most of us women, or all the women, were being recommended to housework. So this war promoted us in doing some activities which were reserved for men, and this made us feel part and parcel of the Revolution and part and parcel of Zimbabwe.

Q. You said the culture, were you talking about the culture of the Shona?

A. Yes.

Q. When this was done, was it easy for the men to accept it, or was it difficult for men to accept women equally working together with them on all levels?

A. At first it was difficult. You see, it was a thing which was being practiced for a long time, but as time goes on, and seeing the determination which was within the women, it convinced the men to accept it, and it also convinced some of the women who were not accepting to work side by side with men. But up till now, I think it is going to take us--it is a few problems which are between us and those women as they remain behind, to teach them that we are independent.

Q. In his speech at the ZANU Women's Seminar, President Mugabe laid out steps to bring women into positions of leadership throughout every aspect of Party life. Has the program been implemented and how much progress has been made?

A. Since the May Seminar, most of our work has been basically how we can get our soldiers moved into the country and how we can establish bases here in the country, so some were being sent for programs abroad and some were even involved in educational programs, and most of our work was now to plan how we can make some of our comrades who were in exile come back home and start educating the masses here.
Q. What percentage of the ZANLA fighters are women, roughly?

A. I can tell you we are 25-30% of the ZANLA fighting comrades.

Q. One thing we noticed in the Delta assembly camp, where the women were fully participating in all the activities: in many ways it seemed the women were doing harder work than the men, carrying very, very heavy loads, cooking pots, supplies of food and material and things like that. Is there some special consideration for women or do they have complete equality in all this kind of work?

A. You know, the equality is not yet complete. Since the years of oppression are quite many, as I have already told you, it will take us some time to convince some of the men to understand our position. And you might see that in some cases there isn't this practice because we haven't had enough time to educate our men to understand that, but in some cases with those who have stayed with us for quite some time they have got that understanding.

Q. How many political prisoners are women?

A. I don't know the exact number, but what I can say is we have got quite a big number of women who are in prison. Most of them were arrested carrying food for fighters in the bush and some were arrested carrying war materials, because for some time we were using our own masses who were staying here to help us do that activity in transporting war materials. And some were even arrested just because their children had left the country for the war.

Q. What was the program on the part of the Women's League to work with peasant women in the liberated areas?

A. There was a program under way — tilling the land. They had to plow these lands in order to grow food for combatants. There were also groups organized to mend or sew clothes for combatants. And some of these women were even organized in such a way that they could go and spy in the enemy camps. This was the biggest program which was assigned to women because it was very difficult for the enemy to know or discover whether these women had come to spy.

Q. So you are saying that a lot of the comrades participated in the intelligence aspect of ZANLA?

A. Yes, the women were the intelligence team.

Q. What was the treatment that the Rhodesian security forces gave women? Did they treat the women especially badly, worse than men when they captured them?

A. Yes, because in some cases we have received reports of women who were tortured to death — it was the Rhodesian security forces — and some were forced to sleep with some of the soldiers, and up to now, some are blind because they had some bad injuries in the head which affected their eyesight, and some are amputated simply because they had been shot. They had special ways of torturing us, and some of these women have even lost their lives when being tortured.

Q. How do the ZANLA comrades, women comrades, feel about reconciliation with the white population, Rhodesian armed forces and the like? Should there be a provisional war crimes session for the types of torture that were perpetrated upon them?

A. No. We, ZANLA comrades, understand that all this was being caused by war, and we understand the situation of the war. Our problem, our task now, is to re-educate those people who are left, and what we are after is to unite with everyone who is prepared to unite. And if the whites can accept our government, we have no problem with them. We are prepared to unite with them. We are not against them, but we are against the system of the government. That is what we want to eliminate.

Q. Is the ZANU Women's League going to be in charge of setting up a program for the children whose parents have died in the war or who are separated from their parents?

A. I think there is going to be a program, but it is going to be set by the Party as to who should be responsible for those orphans. If the program is assigned to us women, we are going to accept it gladly because, you know, it's our duty as mothers to care for those children and since we have been doing the same work really in the forest, I don't think it will be difficult for us to do it once we are living in our own country. ***
Q. Could you just estimate how many orphans there might be as a result of the war?

A. It is quite a big number, quite a big number. I can't give you the definite number because in the country there were some orphans of the parents who were killed by Rhodesian forces and outside the country there was quite a big number too of these orphans of the parents who were killed when the Rhodesian security forces came to attack our bases.

Q. Is the number in the thousands?

A. It could be 20,000.

Q. Comrade, we were up at assembly point Foxtrot, and we saw a lot of young people, young comrades. These comrades seem to have been part of the army structure. Is it the policy of the ZANLA forces to put all their children in the military of ZANLA?

A. I can't say it's our program, but this was being encouraged by them [young people] after they had discovered that this war was for every Zimbabwean. And this was also encouraged by the atrocities which were being committed by the Rhodesian security forces which encouraged them to leave their homes and do this duty because they found that it was the only way which could liberate them.

Q. Would you say that most of the ZANLA forces are from the countryside or from the cities?

A. The biggest numbers of them are in the countryside.

Q. No, I wanted to know where the families are from.

A. Oh, they were the ordinary people, so they farm in the countryside.

Q. You mentioned before that there were women who have trained with ZANU who would come back to work among the ordinary people. Besides the question of orphans, could you give me some idea of the kinds of programming that ZANU will be carrying on among women in Zimbabwe in this period now after the elections?

A. I think our program is to train these women because most of us women are not educated, as our culture didn't allow women to go to school. Even if you go in the reserves you find that most of the women are illiterate.

Q. Is the Party's goal to give the education at home or are you talking about schools abroad?

A. No, it's the basic education which we want to give to our people, because it's very important for a person to know how to read and write and to communicate with some other people who may not understand your own language, it's very important. And I think it will be good for us also send our people abroad in order to get more education. You know, in our country we do not have some types of qualifications which are being found from the comrades which are abroad. So I don't think the Party would ban such education to our own people, but we would encourage it.

Q. I understand from visiting Zimbabwe that it costs something like $100 a year to send a child to school. It costs the parents a lot of money. Will ZANU be introducing a program of free education?

A. Yes.

Q. How will you organize the schools and the salaries?

A. Well, as far as our country is concerned, we are not poor, you know, in terms of meat, minerals, in terms of farming. We have got quite plenty of these mines and you know, what the present government was doing was to ship most of our wealth here out so our people were left with nothing. If we happen to get the government, we won't be shipping our wealth outside the country, but it will be used to make these problems go and that our own people will have enough money or will have good ways of sending their own children to school. And the government will be able to do this because we will be in charge of mines, in charge of farming, and the results which we will be getting from the mining and farming will keep our children going to school.

Q. Comrade, around the question of the family, you spoke about some of the work that has been done by the women in ZANU in terms of taking care of the families, education and so on, around the question of children and the family unit. What is the Party's position around this question of the family unit? Does the party see taking care of the family as primarily the role of women, or men and women, or does the Party see it as men and women plus the people's state who will share in taking care of the family?
A. The Party discovered that it is the responsibility of the husband and the wife to take care of the family, and that in our society it was the man who was being given the responsibility to work and the woman was assigned to cook and care for the children. It wasn't her responsibility to look for the food, but just to cook it, and when it comes to divorce, the woman wasn't given anything, she wasn't allowed to take anything but the children. Raising a family should be the responsibility of both the husband and the wife. We still have to struggle hard in order to solve this problem because our culture is very difficult.

Q. Maybe you could give us a concrete example. If you come to a village in a liberated area or come into an area and the ZANU women comrades discover problems like this, where a woman has been chased away or something like that exists, can you give any examples from your own experience as to how you resolve the question? What role do the ZANLA women comrades play?

A. Most of the time we were putting these people together and trying to find out who was wrong and who was right, and find out the problem which caused them to be divorced. Most of the time we were able to help.

Q. Did it work?

A. Yes, in most cases it was working.

Q. Is it clear that the political oppression, the economics, the racism, the degrading of the man and the woman by the oppressor, tends to make more division among the family, or do you find that inside the liberated areas, where you got the camps, that you have as much bickering and division too?

A. Yes, these divisions were being caused by the system which was being run by the colonialists. Sometimes the man couldn't look after the family well, and a woman happens to go for other men who can provide her with some money or bring food, and with this type of a character, most men became very cross with their wives, so they had to be divorced. So the economic type of system, the political system, the way the government was being run, caused all these differences to happen in the family.

Q. Comrade, the point that you have explained is very, very critical in the United States because the root of contradictions between men and women really has to be looked at by us. I have two questions in relationship to that. One is around this question of marriage. What is the Party's position on polygamy — one man with a lot of wives — or one woman with a lot of husbands (I guess that's polyandry)? And the second question is: What is the Party's position on the question of family planning and methods of birth control?

A. The Party's position on polygamy is: In our society we found that polygamy was one of the most serious conditions which made women not equal. In other words, it is oppression towards women. Some man felt pride just because he had his own wife, and having your own thing which you control gives you pride. But this pride gives a pride to a woman having her own husband even if he goes with other women but not leaving them pregnant. It gives her pride because it's her own secret which she wants to place between herself and the husband. So the Party found that with this question of being equal, the equality should be found also between men and women, that a man should have his partner and a woman should have her partner.

Q. You're saying husband and wife.

A. Yes, husband and wife and wife and husband. And with the birth control, the Party hasn't yet come out with a concrete decision on whether abolishing birth control or promoting it, but since we had great losses in our war, I don't think it's the right time for the Party to encourage birth control.

Q. What about women in the economy? Their wages on farms, I think, are much lower than men. What is the situation of women who work in the countryside and cities? Are they more exploited than men as far as their wages and working conditions?

A. In the colonial system, you know, the condition of women was very serious in our own land. In the type of system which we live under, most women were used as, you know, manpower in education, in health, in everything, and the salary which women were getting was very little. Few amounts of money were being given to women, because they were saying a woman was not entitled to it because she is not responsible for the family or for buying food, but this money she was just given for her own pocket money. Sometimes she couldn't afford the money to buy her own dress she wanted because the money was too little.
So this was also our big battle, that if we are doing the same type of job as men, a women should have the same amount of money the men are getting. Why can't we women be paid the same amount in order to pay for the same amount of things, because we are the ones who are in charge of the family. When that man, my husband, hasn't got enough money, I could pay the money for the good, but I can't because the money I get is very few.

Q. Comrade, what do you think that Black women around the world, and in particular, Black women in the United States, should do to support the Revolution in Zimbabwe?

A. You mean now?

Q. Now, at this stage of the struggle.

A. Up till tomorrow, I think we will be having a lot on our minds because tomorrow is the last day of the judgement whether ZANU wins or we fail. But if we happen to win tomorrow, we would like our women to be into school, and there is all sorts of education which a woman should have. And I think the Black women and the white women also in the worldwide are very helpful in this type of program. Because with the illiterate women which we have got, we would like them to be improved in their academic education. In her day-to-day life, you know, a woman is very important in the family, to look after the kids and the husband and even to improve her family.

Q. What kind of situations has the Party developed to make sure that even though comrades go abroad and live in different cultures, that the principles are maintained?

A. I think the principles which should be maintained are the principals which we follow in our culture. We work with our own culture, so the culture is very important, it should be kept.

Q. In addition to helping ZANLA women or Zimbabwe women going abroad, are there things specifically we could send here? For example, what can we do to aid the building of women's centers?

A. Because we are now entering the new government, this should be done on a bigger scale, the population is too big, and the centers are going to be more than 16. Since, as I said, most of our women are illiterate, all women in every corner of Zimbabwe will be sent to these centers where they can get all sorts of education and all sorts of different programs which will be carried on.

But I think the program will be improved and what we have in mind is that if there are volunteers from other countries who are ready to come and help us really establish these centers, keep them running, to come and help teach in those centers, I think it would be very useful for Zimbabwean women. And it would be very useful for those funds which you raise to come and keep these centers going. We can't say we are going to be able to work on our own a lot of mines and farms -- it will take us time. It might be three or four years to come, but then we'll be able to stand on our own. But during this initial period, it will be very difficult to run all the programs necessary.

Q. Is that something like the Brigades in Cuba, only that it's not so rural and agricultural -- it might be just specifically around education and skills that are relevant?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you have any intention to celebrate International Working Women's Day here, combine it with your victory celebration, for example?

A. Oh, it will be a pleasure that I hope you will still be around for!

Q. Comrade, has the Party decided where the capital of Zimbabwe will be once they assume control of the government?

A. It will be Harare; that's the original name of the area that is now called Salisbury.

Q. So it's going to be the same place with a different name.

A. Yes, the same as it was in Mozambique -- it was called Lourenco Marques, but now it's Maputo. When the whites came here, it was called Harare, but they changed it to Salisbury.

Q. Could I just ask you a personal question -- how long you've been, were you actually fighting in the field as well as being the Women's Commander at the time, and how old you were, if you don't mind a personal question?

A. When I joined the Party, I was 17. When I started fighting I was 17. At the age of 18 I was a medical officer. At 19 I was a political commissar and political instructor. Up to now I am commanding the Women's League and the Women's Detachment. So I am the head of all the women in ZANU.

Q. So how old are you now?

A. Now I am 25.

Q. You're young! Thank you very much.

A. Thank you.
CREDITS

Articles from Zimbabwe News, official organ of ZANU:

"First Zimbabwe Women's Seminar" January-June 1979
"Why I Joined ZANLA Women's Detachment" June 1974
"Zimbabwe Women" May 1974
"Our Women are Women of Action" Jan.-Feb. 1978
"The Emancipation of Women" Jan.-Feb. 1978
"Women Have Total Involvement in Struggle" May-June 1978
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