

## **Mourning Robert Gabriel Mugabe - A mixed legacy**

6 September 2019

Today we mourn the death of one of the remnants of the rare generation of Pan-African and Frontline States leaders. Robert Gabriel Mugabe will be remembered for the great achievements in his earlier period and also the many challenges under his watch in the later part of his reign.

In mourning Mugabe, on one hand, the nation stands in awe of a man who together with other liberation heroes was part of a liberation struggle for the independence of Zimbabwe. He demonstrated rare determination, tenacity and principle during the Lancaster House and other negotiations. Mugabe's call for reconciliation in his inauguration speech in 1980 endowed him with international recognition as well as offering hope to Zimbabweans that ours would be a nation united above the shallow divisions of race and ethnicity. Mugabe's early prioritization of universal access to primary and secondary education as well as primary health, made Zimbabwe incomparable to many developing nations. Though it was done in a chaotic way, Mugabe's insistence on black ownership of land proved him to be a true Pan-Africanist. All these aspects of Mugabe must be celebrated.

On the other hand, one cannot ignore the dark side of Mugabe's tenure characterized by brutalization of political opponents inside and outside his own political party. One cannot forget the loss of thousands of lives in Midlands and Matabeleland during the Gukurahundi. As we mourn President Mugabe, Zimbabwe will not forget how his rhetoric and political gamesmanship inhibited consensus politics. It was Mugabe's failure to design or respect a proper exit strategy that created transitional uncertainty whose effects have remained with us. Mugabe's reign saw the development of an economic culture characterized by corruption, patronage and nepotism. This led to economic decline, and the consequent deterioration of service delivery. It is sad that the early champion of access to health care for all consummated his life journey in a foreign hospital.

The above notwithstanding, Mugabe's life must be celebrated, not as an aggregation of the good and the bad, but as an unfinished legacy. Mugabe's legacy would be reclaimed if education and health services are restored to the levels he started it. Mugabe's early ideals will be recovered if the nation is united and citizens are free from fear of persecution. Mugabe may rest in peace if the nation is truly reconciled and the victims and perpetrators of past atrocities can embrace. Mugabe will have been appropriately mourned, if an inclusive economy free from corruption, cronyism and patronage is recovered. Mugabe will rest in peace if his last plea to separate the gun from the politics is exalted.

As we mourn Mugabe, whose ambivalent reign ushered both progress and decline, we must do so in light of the scripture he used in his inauguration speech in 1980, *“He shall judge the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they war any more”* Isaiah 2 verse 4. Such scripture envisions a society moving towards full unity, peace, justice and prosperity for all!