



4 ZIMBABWEAN STORY

story collected in 2005

I am a Zimbabwean asylum seeker in Northern Ireland. I left Zimbabwe in 2002. I am married and have two children. In Zimbabwe I used to work as a manager for a non-governmental organisation. The company used to lend money to poor people who couldn't get loans from the banks to start their own business.

Why am I here? It all started in 1999 when the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions started to transform itself into an opposition political party, now known as the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). A friend who was a lecturer at a local technical college introduced me to the MDC and its policies. I liked the ideology. It looked very promising in terms of developing all sectors of the country unlike Zanu PF (Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front, President Mugabe's party). I was involved in distributing the

information leaflets.

The next stage was the formation of the local structures of party and I was made a co-coordinator in my province. My duties involved organising meetings and passing information onto the people of my district. As a co-coordinator I was seriously involved in organising rallies and at most of the rallies we were attacked by Zanu PF militias. We would report to the police all the incidents and they would not take any action. In one of the rallies we were attacked and I sustained injuries. I went to hospital for treatment.

One of the Zanu PF leaders in the province approached me and asked me to help with some proposals for funding for the war veterans. I refused and he said to me that I would be sorry for that. Another member of Zanu PF approached me and said, 'You have been a good member of the society would you not

want a piece of land?' I turned down his offer because I was not in agreement to what Mugabe was doing. On 21st September 2001 the provincial leadership invited me to a meeting in the Mandava hotel. We were up to 30 people in the meeting. After an hour the police came to the room where we were holding the meeting. They said we were holding an illegal meeting under the Public Order Security Act (POSA). This is a draconian act, which was passed by Zanu PF government of Mugabe to try and stop the opposition from holding rallies. The police took down our details and they told us to go away.

We continued holding rallies all over the province and the police continued to harass us every time. They would come and say we did not apply for permission to hold the meetings. Every time we applied they would turn down our application. They would say our rallies would provoke violence. But Zanu PF did not

have to apply because they are the government in power. I had my house attacked and we ran for dear life. I went to Harare to leave my son there with relatives. When I was in Harare, the MDC intelligence officer told me I had to be careful because Zanu PF militias wanted to kill me and that the police were charging me with the POSA for holding a meeting at the Mandava hotel. I realised I had no security from the police.

I ran away to South Africa. I bought an air ticket to Dublin. When I got to Dublin the immigration officer told me that if I would seek asylum, they would return me home within the same day. I was very scared and I said to him I am on holiday for three months. I thought that would buy me time since the elections were only two weeks away. I was convinced that the MDC would win the presidential elections and I would go home. Things went wrong when Mugabe rigged the elections and won. I came to Northern Ireland and met people from the African Cultural Centre. They advised me not to be afraid but to go and apply for asylum. I did and the UK government told me to go back to Dublin since I got there first. I appealed against the decision. The court has stopped my removal to Dublin.

I found life difficult in the first days because of the weather. Now I am used to it. Generally people are good, though you always find some few people who are bad. They shout abusive racial statements. Some just don't accept you because you are of a different colour. They don't seem to trust anything said by a black person. Everywhere you buy something your money is always verified. There is a lack of trust.

The churches are good in every aspect except they seem to lack fellowship. Most of the black people I have spoken to feel the community is not accepting them. The most important task for any organisation trying to

help the minority ethnic group is to find a suitable way of integrating these people. Some of these people are going to be here for a while.