

GIVER OF LIFE

Lloyd Mazivarimwe (Zimbabwe)



Somewhere in the Republic of Uzumba, 2 hours earlier...

“Comrades, the end is nigh. The moment of reckoning is upon us. Uzumba has taken food from your mouths and your children’s. Uzumba has snuffed out the light in your homes, and has endangered the mere existence of a people! Just look at the giver of life, the Victoria Falls. One of the natural wonders of the world but now just a pitiful trickle! From it, generations have lived and from it, generations will continue to live, if not for Uzumba. It is thus upon us – as sons and daughters of the soil – to fight for our survival and the right to live. To have dominion over the earth as well as enjoy its fruits. Long live the Monomotapa Kingdom! This war is like no other. Remember why? As Winston Churchill once said, ‘Let us brace ourselves to our duties’, and so bear ourselves that, if the Monomotapa Kingdom lasts for a thousand years, men will still say this was our finest hour!” roars Colonel Bhimba as he rallies his special mission.

*National Patriotic Movement Rally, Uzumba Unity Square Park,
23rd October 2050...*

“History has continually shown that he who dares wins. As we take each day, uncertain of what the day will bring, you can rest assured knowing that I will put your interests first and fight for you,” His Excellency, Cole Magingo vows.

“Magingo! Magingo! Magingo!”

The emotionally charged-up crowd chants and after a moment, His Excellency raises his hand to a duly obliging gathering and continues, “A water crisis ravages much of the world, but God has been kind to us. It is, therefore, squarely upon Uzumba – a sovereign nation – to do as she pleases with her abundant water and natural resources. Let it be known to all our neighbours and the international community that the Republic of Uzumba will not be intimidated nor will she accept anything that impinges upon her sovereignty. Uzumba shall never be a colony again!”

The crowd bursts into songs of valour and tribute, glorifying Magingo and then out of the blue, Boom! Boom! Boom!

“What’s happening?” Magingo shouts.

Boom! Boom!

There is commotion, a stampede and within seconds blood everywhere.

“I can’t see, help, somebody!” someone shouts.

“My leg, help! I can’t move,” another cries out while trapped in the rubble as many others run from all directions to all directions.

“What’s going on?”

Sirens start to wail from a distance. I cannot shake off the ring in my ear from the high-pitched deafening sound of another blast and indiscriminate shooting.

‘Is this an assassination? Where is the President?’ I wonder, dazed and trapped inside an eruption of blindingly and suffocating smoke from the explosion.

“I can’t breathe!”

I pass out.

3 months later...

'100 days have already passed!' I thought to myself as I sat gazing at the Wooden Tablet inscribed: African Union's Chair for Year 2051. I had solemnly sworn to faithfully execute the duties of the Office of the President of the Republic of Uzumba and to give the very best of my ability, in preserving, protecting and defending our hallowed Constitution. But as I stared at the Wooden Tablet, my Africanness demanded that I extend the duty of care towards my fellow Africans. More so, Uzumba had assumed the African Union's Chairship – a development that aggravated already fraught circumstances of seemingly conflictual interests.

"Is His Excellency Magingo really gone!"

It may have been three months since 23rd October but I was still in disbelief that my mentor, brother and friend was no longer with us. Boom! Another explosion shakes the foundations of the City of Hope, again. It had been the third attack in a fortnight and the capital had indeed become Aleppo.

The tales of cruelty and unconscionable crimes committed along the Zambezi – which some perceived to be retaliatory and justified – were often dismissed as fake news but people close to General Ganguly and his nemesis, Colonel Bhimba could not put such savagery beyond them. Abject poverty had turned many southern Africans into illegal immigrants; with millions flocking into the resource-rich Uzumba and thereby sparking dormant xenophobic attitudes amongst the locals. Brutal beatings, torchings and the tossing of immigrants into the crocodile-infested parts of the Zambezi had become familiar horror tales.

"So it takes very little to straddle the line between savagery and civility, just as depicted in the novel *Lord of the Flies*,' I brood over with a chilling realisation that humans and animals may not be

different after all. If only Magingo had hearkened, perhaps, he could still be alive. General Ganguly and his cabal wielded too much influence on the Republic and had led the President and country on a dangerous slippery slope. But can you blame anyone for putting their country first in such times, I ponder! The world, as we know it, has changed so much so that even the optimists lack the merest of hope that we will ever get back our world.

Starvation, frequent droughts, environmental degradation and high mortality rates caused or worsened by climate change has left the Southern African Development Community teetering on the brink of its worst humanitarian crisis. To compound the crises, decades of high population growth patterns had made for a deadly scramble for resources, sparking tribalism, civil wars, terrorism and interstate wars which threaten to wipe-off everyone in the region and reverse the hard-earned socio-economic gains of the past decades.

Climate scientists long beseeched the world to heed once upon a time. I blame past generations for not acting sooner. Why couldn't they act! Isn't the Brundtland Report written in 1987? They talked about posterity then, yet nothing was done to protect us! Such a selfish lot!

Much of the world has gone into a panic mode, and regional water instruments are being scorned resulting in the utter disregard of principles for equitable and reasonable utilisation of shared water resources and more importantly the duty not to cause significant transboundary harm. Construction of several dams and other projects is largely being done without any notification procedures – a situation that has adversely affected lower riparian states and triggered a chain reaction of reprisals and violence. The arid Kingdom of Monomotapa – heavily reliant on the waters for

hydropower generation and irrigation – has suffered the most from the unilateral diversion of the waters up-stream.

‘I am the President and must do something promptly,’ I muse as I sip a Bells whisky.

The assassination of Magingo has escalated tensions and strained relations with the Monomotapa Kingdom and anarchists, like General Ganguly, look to exploit the situation for political gain. I had ignored whispers within the corridors of power that the feared General was planning a *coup de tat*, but I could no longer deny the inevitable. He had led rebellious troops into avenging the assassination of Magingo across the borders, despite vehement denials by the Monomotapa Kingdom of their involvement in the 23rd October events.

“Had I moved to retaliate Magingo’s assassination, I would have lost the backing of the international community. We need the international community, especially for the Water Peace Accord,” I argue my rationale for restraint to Mazhindu, my top Aide.

“But your Excellency, the optics won’t look good; you will be perceived as weak and will lose the backing of some of Magingo’s powerful followers who already disregard your presidency on the basis that you are merely an unelected Vice President who assumed Office by chance. They are watching and waiting to see if you are deserving,” Mazhindu retorts without mincing his words.

Such was my dilemma, yet a hesitancy that allowed the Machiavellian General to swoop in for glory and inch a step closer to the throne.

To arrest the enduring crisis, the UN Security Council approved Resolution 678 on the deployment of peacekeepers and adopted a slew of other measures aimed at restoring peace and stability in the region. The conclusion of the Water Peace Accord is fundamental to the restoration of stability but Magingo, under the influence of

General Ganguly, had frustrated this process. This Accord, amongst other measures, paves the way for huge grants meant to rebuild the City of Hope as well as the lifting of sanctions whose crippling effect has not spared Uzumba's economy in the slightest. As I listened to the news later that day, CNN's Amira – a correspondent for the region reported that an Africa Development Bank's study found that, "If the water crisis is not averted, 10 million more people would fall into poverty and that without the Zambezi River, arid countries like the Monomotapa Kingdom and the Kivhuku Republic face an uncertain future."

I do not want their blood on my hands.

'Help me God,' I recall the last words of my oath as I sat there, deep in thought, having a faith crisis and wondering about the existence of God.

"Trust Him more and He will show you the way," Devine offers reassuring words with her gentle yet authoritative voice. I had always wondered if the First Lady could read my thoughts.

"But how do I heal a nation, a region so broken when I am not even sure I will still have a job tomorrow?" I ask, rhetorically. With her usual calmness and a tender hand on my right shoulder, retorts that, "Hope is and will always be alive." Nonchalant it seemed, yet so invigorating though only for a moment as my thoughts snappishly shift back to a nation, a region on the precipice of plunging into the abyss of full-blooded violence, lawlessness and economic ruin.

The far-right groups have polarised the region; with General Ganguly ramping up his nationalist populism and pandering to the worst instincts of the peoples of Uzumba. While engrossed in thought, I hear heavy panting from a distance, with each step drawing ever closer, "Your Excellency! Your Excellency! We have just received intel from the UN Peacekeeping Mission that General

Ganguly has perished in a battle at the Victoria Falls,” Mazhindu barges in shouting.

“And hundreds of women and children are some of the casualties... and my apologies for barging in like that President Guvheya,” he continued. His tone betrayed sadness, incredulity as well as relief. I just stood there, motionless, perplexed and as paradoxically overwhelmed by a pang of suffocating guilt, yet, lifted by a seemingly new lease of life. “I knew in my heart of hearts I could have done something to avert the situation; rather, I left General Ganguly to run amok and escalate an already difficult situation. That aside, I now could focus on leading and healing this country as a leader should,” I needed to act!

African Union Headquarters, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: AU Special Summit, 31st September 2051

“Your Majesties,

Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,

Your Excellency, Ms Ivy Eyrans Williams, Secretary-General of the United Nations, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

As Chair to the African Union and President of the Republic of Uzumba, I extend to you my warmest regards on the occasion of our special and hastily convened AU Summit. There is a dark cloud hanging over our regions, our nations and communities and it is in such difficult unprecedented times that we gather here for the preservation of humanity. Fellow Africans and citizens of the world, three decades ago, the Global Commission on Adaptation indicated in its ‘Adapt Now’ Report that, *‘Climate change will stifle agricultural produce by 30%, increase the number of people lacking sufficient water, at least for a month, from 3.6 billion to 5 billion as well as drive about 100 million people in the developing world into poverty by 2050.’*

Ladies and gentleman, our plight is even grimmer! Our world is crumbling right before us and instead of joining hands with fellow brethren, we fight amongst ourselves, reversing the manifold achievements of our founding fathers. In the decades past, some believed climate change was a hoax but we have now witnessed the sheer devastation caused by this monster. Therefore, as we painfully and particularly look back to the events of the past two years that have brought us here today, let us take heed of the three most important lessons: one, cooperation, two, cooperation and three, cooperation. With billions of people experiencing dire water shortages and now awakening to the centrality of water for the continued survival of our people; anxiety, terror and panic gripped most of us, if not all. With all rationality and ubuntuism cast aside, our world went back to the dark ages, a time when the doctrine of absolute territorial sovereignty – championed by the then US Attorney General, Judson Harmon – was relied upon for disregarding the other. As it was then, it is so today with transboundary water conflicts ubiquitous. It is trite that without equitable and reasonable utilisation of the Zambezi River as well as any other transboundary waters across Africa, violence will always grip our regions. History will judge us for innocent lives lost, and rightly so. Nevertheless, these unfortunate events provide a timely reminder of the paramount importance of water resources and the urgent need for sustainable utilisation. More so, the need for cooperation in the sustainable utilisation of this precious resource thereof. Water may have caused conflict in times past, but water can and shall now be the catalyst to foster closer cooperation between states.

As we gather here to conclude the Water Peace Accord, I would like, on behalf of the Republic of Uzumba, to regrettably acknowledge and take responsibility for our role in exacerbating the water and climate change crisis and consequent atrocities of Victoria Falls and

many other places where innocent lives were lost. More importantly, we offer our utmost and sincere apologies to affected families and communities. I, therefore, wish to assure you of the full cooperation of Uzumba as well as reaffirming our respect for international law, regional water agreements as well as the rightful and important role of the SADC, AU and UN in the management of issues affecting international peace and security. Water is one such matter. As the dark cloud dissipates and clear skies return, let us all remember the importance of sustainable and integrated management of water resources for water is indeed the Giver of life!”

I conclude to rousing applause; shake hands and embrace His Excellency, Yegon Kipkoach of the Monomotapa Kingdom in a show of solidarity as he stepped to the podium.

“Long live Africa!” we both shout and the entire auditorium quickly reverberates as the rest of the African leaders and heads of state and government enthusiastically cry out, “Long live Africa!”