

OPENING REMARKS

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On behalf of the National Democratic Institute and Freedom House, two independent non-governmental organizations supporting people building democratic societies worldwide and supporting the expansion of freedom in the world, respectively, I would like to welcome all of you to today's discussion, "Zimbabwe's New Deal."

In the past six months, any talk on Zimbabwe recounted only the negatives: election-related deaths and violence, lack of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, chronic food shortages, and rampant inflation. But with yesterday's signing of the historic "Agreement between ZANU-PF and the two MDC Formations on Resolving the Challenges Facing Zimbabwe," we have some reason for optimism.

On paper, the parties have declared their commitment to work together to "create a genuine, viable, permanent, sustainable and nationally acceptable solution to the Zimbabwe situation and in particular to implement the agreement with the aims of resolving once and for all the current political and economic situations and charting a new political direction for the country." The Agreement provides a framework for dealing with such critical issues as:

- Land;
- Constitutional reform via referendum;
- Promotion of equality, national healing, cohesion, and unity;
- Freedom of assembly, association, expression, communication, and political activity;
- Respect for the rule of law;
- Humanitarian assistance and food aid; and
- Security of persons and prevention of violence.

While the agreement provides an outline for the new government and creates the post of prime minister, it also specifies that the parties themselves will co-chair their own Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee to ensure full and proper implementation of the letter and spirit of the agreement. Interestingly, the agreement does not state the length of the transition period, nor does it mention a timeframe for elections. Finally, while the implementation of the agreement is "guaranteed and underwritten by the Facilitator, SADC, and the AU," the agreement also reaffirms the UN Charter's principle on non-interference in the internal affairs of member countries.

With these issues from the agreement in mind, I thank you all for attending or listening to this co-sponsored event by NDI and Freedom House in what we expect to be a lively and interesting discussion from our panelists.

Thomas Melia, Freedom House deputy executive director, will introduce the panelists and serve as today's moderator.

Thank you.