

Are we serious about ending violence against children?



LAILA KHANDKAR

A report titled, "Keeping the Promise: Ending Violence Against Children by 2030" has recently been presented by Najat Maalla M'jid, Special Representative

of events on violence against children, I have been thinking of all the children I met in different parts of world whose lives have been shattered by violence. Moreover, I was also reminded of the weak implementation of laws and policies, and the limited investment to protect children, as well as the social norms that make violence against children acceptable in many places.

Violence against children is a violation of their right to be protected from harm, abuse and neglect. Violence affects children's development, health and education in adverse ways, and weakens efforts to ensure sustainable development.

The violence children face is cumulative and interlinked, which often spans their home life, school, community and online world. Any child subjected to violence in any of these settings is likely to experience violence in any or all of the others. Studies show that children exposed to violence at an early age are more likely to be victims of violence later. They may also become perpetrators and use violence against their partners and children. This means we must end violence against children if we are to stop the inter-generational cycle of violence in society.

We know that every child is vulnerable to violence. However, some are more vulnerable due to key risk factors, including discrimination, poverty, disability and gender. Certain forms of violence affect girls disproportionately, while boys are also being affected more than we had thought earlier. According to Save the Children, almost one fifth of the children worldwide are now living in areas affected by armed conflict and are disproportionately suffering the consequences of violence.

In addition to direct impact of violence against children, there is also



the matter of the significant financial cost it entails. According to some estimates, the total cost of physical, sexual and psychological violence against children (measured indirectly as losses in future productivity) ranges between two percent and five per cent of global GDP. This may reach up to

eight percent of global GDP—about US\$ 7 trillion.

In general, very little progress has been made to address SDG 16, and with regard to some targets, we are going backwards. SDG 16 is the moral backbone of the 2030 Agenda, since it recognises the equal standing of every

person. Renewed efforts are necessary to make the realisation of SDG 16 into a reality, which includes bringing more momentum to end violence against children.

Violence is not inevitable. There is solid evidence that it is preventable. International agencies have developed and endorsed the evidence-based package INSPIRE: seven strategies for ending violence against children. There is evidence that a comprehensive approach that reinforces entire systems would work. Now we need political commitment to act urgently to end this malaise.

Governments should prioritise ending violence against children and allocate adequate funding in child protection systems. Donors should increase funding for child protection services and violence prevention and response interventions. Governments, international agencies and civil society must facilitate processes to ensure safe, meaningful and active inclusion of children's voices in combating violence.

All actors need to work together to end harmful practices and change the social norms that drive those practices. This should include promoting gender equality, positive parenting, early learning and inclusive quality education. Governments should deliver their commitments to uphold the internationally agreed standards of conduct in conflict, hold perpetrators of violations of child rights to account, and take practical action to effectively protect children and support their recovery.

If we do not end all forms of violence against children, we risk jeopardising efforts to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies. The time for action is now and we all need to join the movement to protect our children.

The writer is Head of Advocacy and Policy—Child Protection, Save the Children International

When remembering Robert Mugabe's corrupt legacy, blame Britain

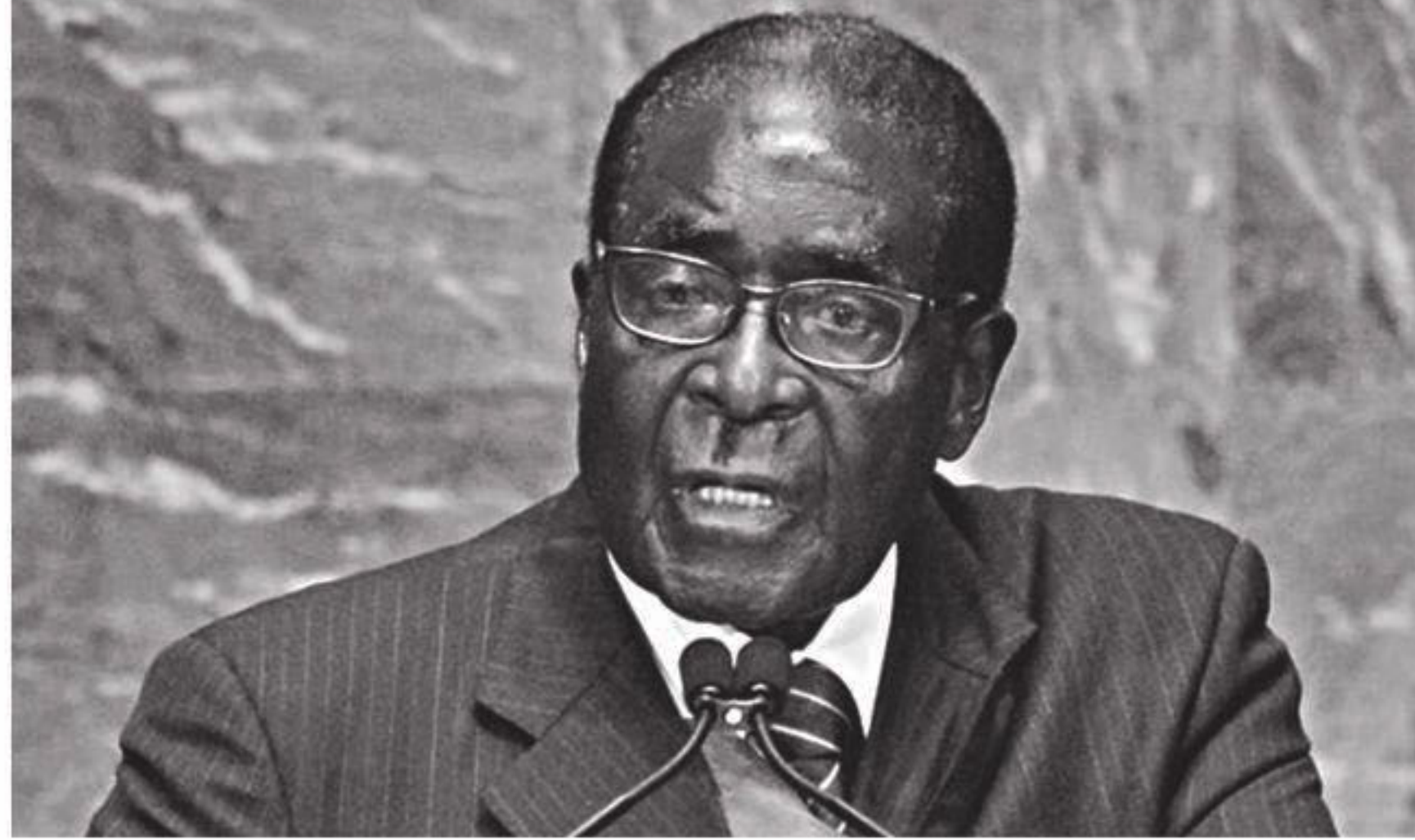
JAMES NORTH

WHEN I last saw Robert Mugabe, in 1980, he was the most popular man in Zimbabwe. An inspiring hero in Africa and around the world, Mugabe had just led his nation to independence from Britain after his Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) political party won a smashing victory in the country's first free elections. Now he is dead at age 95—after Zimbabweans had largely repudiated him for years, and the rest of the world had long regarded him as a corrupt tyrant.

What went wrong? Mainstream media reports will concentrate on Mugabe's personal failings: his intellectual arrogance, his authoritarianism, and—after he fell under the influence of his second, grasping wife, Grace—his greed. All are true, but together are still not enough to explain his and Zimbabwe's tragedy.

Even a leader free of Mugabe's negative qualities would have struggled after independence, partly because of two legacies of British colonialism. The British left behind a time bomb: a grotesquely unequal distribution of land in the countryside. And they taught Zimbabweans that you can ignore peaceful efforts to change, but that violence works. It was a lesson that Mugabe would put to tragic use.

Before independence, some 6,000 white British settlers and their descendants had stolen the more fertile half of the Zimbabwean countryside,



Robert Mugabe.

PHOTO: AFP

while in the more arid half, 4 million black Zimbabweans were squeezed into small plots. During the 1980 election campaign, Mugabe and others raised the looming land crisis as a burning issue, but British diplomats brushed off their concerns, vaguely promising future compensation to buy out the white farmers. Britain had already paid off most of its settlers in Kenya during the 1960s, helping to create a middle class of black farmers who became a source of stability, and Zimbabweans hoped Kenya would set the precedent.

But no. The land crisis in rural Zimbabwe festered for two decades, as successive British prime ministers—even Tony Blair's supposedly progressive Labour government—

continued to stall. Finally, in 2000, desperate black Zimbabweans started seizing white-owned farms. Mugabe, in his 20th year as the country's leader, did not launch this movement, but he opportunistically saw that he could improve his much-diminished popularity by supporting it. Chaos and violence swept across rural Zimbabwe, but Britain escaped the blame. Today, obituaries for Mugabe in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* distort the crisis, ignoring its imperial roots.

Britain's other awful legacy in Zimbabwe was a lesson in the efficacy of violence. During the 1950s, Mugabe and the other leaders of Zimbabwe's independence movement were not violent people. They formed peaceful

political movements, and they campaigned for independence and the end of white minority rule using conciliatory language and tactics of Western democracy, which they had learned in their colonial schools.

They got nowhere. The white minority in Rhodesia, as the country was still called, seized power from Britain in 1965 and imposed an even harsher system of white supremacy, just like apartheid South Africa. Britain had put down rebellions in other colonies with darker-skinned subjects, but it did not send paratroopers to Rhodesia. For the next 10 years, Mugabe, a high school teacher, was confined to a prison camp alongside his pro-independence colleagues. His little son died while he was locked up, but he was not allowed out to attend the funeral.

Only after Britain failed to remove that white-minority breakaway regime did black Zimbabweans launch the bitter seven-year war that eventually forced independence. I witnessed some of that conflict, and the viciousness was breathtaking. I remember black guerrillas telling me that the white soldiers did not take prisoners but routinely hanged anyone they captured. I heard those same white "troopies" casually refer to blacks as "floppies"—because they supposedly "flopped" when you shot them.

After independence in 1980, the apartheid regime launched a violent undercover campaign against Mugabe's new government, including sabotage and assassinations. Certain political rivals within Zimbabwe may or may

not have been linked to that campaign. What is certain is that Mugabe responded with terrible counterforce, and his soldiers killed thousands of people, nearly all of them innocent civilians, mostly in the southwest.

I returned to Zimbabwe in 2014 after a long absence, and I was not surprised to find that Mugabe was now widely hated, and that a country that had once been so full of hope had soured into an atmosphere of corruption, opportunism, and violence. His ZANU-PF party, once a principled and idealistic force, had long since been transformed into thuggish paramilitaries, and Mugabe had actually lost every election from 2002 onward, holding on to power only by force.

But there is cause for optimism. For decades now, a brave opposition movement, one that certainly enjoys majority support, has fought for genuine democracy. One of its leaders, the union activist Morgan Tsvangirai, survived three assassination attempts before dying of cancer in 2018, but he never turned to violence. Emmerson Mnangagwa, who seized power from Mugabe in a palace coup in 2017, faces continued stiff resistance from Tsvangirai's successors.

Robert Mugabe himself was never brought to justice. But he did have a final tragedy: that he lived long enough to see Zimbabwe disown him.

James North lives in New York City. He has reported from Africa, Latin America, and Asia for four decades. Copyright: The Nation/Asia News Network

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

September 8, 1945
THE DIVISION OF KOREA BEGAN

United States troops arrived to partition the southern part of Korea in response to Soviet troops occupying the northern part of the peninsula a month earlier.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Staff symbol
- 6 Blinds piece
- 10 From the Arctic
- 11 Even though
- 12 Blow away
- 13 Catcher Castro
- 14 Titled woman
- 15 Geisha garb
- 16 Freud topic
- 17 Rent out
- 18 Capitol Bldg. worker
- 19 Chianti and Bordeaux
- 22 Pants line
- 23 Hawaiian instruments
- 26 Common evergreens
- 29 Scoundrel

DOWN

- 1 James of "The Blacklist"
- 2 Tributes
- 3 Apple pie order
- 4 Destroy
- 5 Opposite of post- greens
- 6 Counterfeit
- 7 Long cars
- 8 Unescorted
- 9 Mortise's mate
- 11 Newspaper reports
- 15 Writer Follett
- 17 Five-line poem
- 20 Type of horse
- 21 Go downhill
- 24 Turns into a cryptogram
- 25 Leakage preventer
- 27 Cubby hole?
- 28 Newscast segment
- 29 Amusing
- 30 Game site
- 31 Murdered
- 35 Seed-removing machines
- 36 Book unit
- 38 Hightailed it

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BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker

HI, GENERAL!
THAT'S A LAZY SALUTE. MAKE IT SNAPPY!
SOK!
NOT THAT SNAPPY!

BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

POOR BOUNCE QUALITY. I'LL NEVER TOUCH THE CEILING.
WE'LL TAKE IT.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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