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There are understandably calls for "more to be done" during Zimbabwe's political stalemate. () Ordinary Zimbabweans might worry that the international community's sound and fury will signify nothing or that outside pressure might actually worsen their situation.

What ought the world do differently? Under the UN Charter, Security Council members must agree that a threat to international peace and security exists before the system fully engages. Despite fears of regional instability in Southern Africa, China will be keen that such situations be classed as internal disturbances only. And a very strong Council response could actually be counter-productive now: it raises the stakes, compelling players to harden positions, perhaps cutting off options. While serious consequences must be communicated, there are other mechanisms for inducing cooperation. ()

Consistency is related to the legitimacy and persuasiveness of future action elsewhere. Through the UN, the international community agreed in principle in 2005 that it has a "**responsibility to protect**"

populations from genocide and other grave crimes where a government is unable to do so, or is itself the perpetrator. While dire, the situation in Zimbabwe does not trigger this norm. Should things deteriorate, care must be taken lest this valuable, evolving principle already being sorely tested in Darfur be undermined from the start by inconsistency.

() The African Union is over-cautious and failing, with some members wary of setting themselves unhappy precedents. But on one view the AU has by no means yet exhausted its considerable persuasive potential. There are some parallels with ASEAN's stance on Burma. () However, one risk is not that such institutions might act prematurely but that they might hardly act at all, scuttling their ability to ever really say anything meaningful again.

The EU has smart and arms sanctions in place and can be a more moderate voice than certain Western governments, creating political space for the players to move into. China has long supported Mugabe. As with Burma and Darfur, one useful international community role is not simply to criticise China, but to encourage it to balance the increasing material benefits it derives from these poorer places with being a more mature, responsible, positive influence.

Perhaps the Commonwealth, meanwhile, should have done more since 2003 towards a stronger explicit united position on Zimbabwe. ()

South Africa is a major player. Its "quiet diplomacy" was not irrational, even if its senior officials' lack of solidarity with another oppressed people showed a very short memory indeed. () Pressure is important, but applied bluntly it can actually worsen the situation, while making us all feel that we are "doing something".

In seeking options, it is unhelpful to speak of international criminal prosecutions. Aside from legal problems, powerful but prosecutable people sometimes need incentives to negotiate a

peaceful solution. This can create unfortunate precedents, but may be necessary. ()

() An international response should be united and consistent and balance "sticks" with "carrots": the leadership must be assured that a transition is possible. () So while it is true that too much outside pressure can cause a boil-over, there is also a risk that things just bubble along while hope and so much more evaporates.

Source:

<http://canberra.yourguide.com.au/news/opinion/opinion/its-best-to-play-the-waiting-game-on-zimbabwe/1235856.html>