



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe – ZWE39269 – Thembinkosi
Sibindi – Political Career

15 September 2011

1. Please provide available information on Thembinkosi Sibindi, including information regarding his political career and election campaign/s.

Thembinkosi Sibindi has served as a member of ZANU-PF, MDC-Tsvangirai (MDC-T), and MDC-Mutambara (MDC-M). Sources state that Sibindi was a ZANU-PF deputy mayor of Victoria Falls in the early 2000s^{1 2}, and was elected as an MDC-T member of parliament for Hwange East constituency, Matabeleland North, in 2005.³ He was defeated in 2008 elections when he stood as an MDC-M candidate for Hwange West Constituency.⁴

Thembinkosi Sibindi was a ZANU-PF member and acting mayor of Victoria Falls in August 2001. At this time, many Zambian residents were crossing the border into Zimbabwe, exchanging currency on the black market and buying up commodities from local shops in bulk before crossing back into Zambia. Many of the goods bought in Zimbabwe were later resold in Zambian shops, and War Veterans reportedly blamed high inflation on these cross-border traders.^{5 6} *IRIN News* reported that, according to Sibindi, a group of ZANU-PF supporters, known as ‘War Veterans’⁷, forcibly closed supermarkets and wholesale shops over the course of a morning, before approaching the border crossing and ordering customs officers to close it. The crossing remained closed for around an hour. *IRIN News* further reported on Sibindi’s reaction to the incident:

Theminkosi Sibindi, Victoria Falls acting mayor, confirmed that a mob closed the border post and supermarkets, and strongly condemned their action...“It is high time the government stopped these people, he is quoted as saying. “I am a ZANU-PF mayor with ZANU-PF councillors but we do not support the actions of the war veterans. The business community and workers have been coming to me to complain about the actions of these people.” He said Victoria Falls residents

¹ ‘Mob close Victoria Falls border post’ 2001, *IRIN News*, 22 August

<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=25246> – Accessed 13 September 2011

² Thornycroft, P. 2001, ‘Jailed white farmers out on bail after 17 nights’, *The Telegraph*, 23 August

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/zimbabwe/1338313/Jailed-white-farmers-out-on-bail-after-17-nights.html> – Accessed 13 September 2011

³ Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network 2005, *Report on the Zimbabwe’s 2005 General Election*, April, p. 62

⁴ ‘Full list of elections candidates’ 2008, *SW Radio Africa*, 3 March

http://www.swradioafrica.com/pages/full_list030308.htm – Accessed 4 July 2011

⁵ ‘Mugabe Mob Closes Zambia Border to Stop Traders’ ANC Daily News Briefing, source: *South African Press Association*, etools.co.za website <http://www.e-tools.co.za/newsbrief/2001/news0823.txt> – Accessed 13 September 2011

⁶ ‘Unrest in Zimbabwe over high inflation’ 2001, *The Irish Times*, 8 August

<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/world/2001/0823/01082300068.html> – Accessed 9 September 2011

⁷ For background on the ‘War Veterans’ please see RRT Country Advice – Melbourne. 2011, ‘Issues Paper – Zimbabwe’, April, Section 11

should not be held to ransom by a few misguided elements masquerading as ex-combatants and that their actions were further destroying the town's already severely depressed tourism industry.⁸

Mr Sibindi also reportedly denied a claim made by a senior assistant police commissioner that the border post had not actually been closed, saying that “[t]he police were not even seen there. These war veterans are doing what they want”.⁹ An article in *The Telegraph* quotes Mr Sibindi as stating that he felt embarrassed to be a ZANU-PF mayor in light of the War Veterans’ actions in closing the border.¹⁰

Monitoring by the Amani Trust stated that this public criticism of War Veterans’ actions directly led to the assault of Mr Sibindi; he was reportedly assaulted by War Veterans on 22 August 2001, and, together with five other councillors, forced to walk for three kilometres from his office before being “saved” by police on patrol.¹¹ *The Daily News (Harare)* also reported that Mr Sibindi was assaulted by War Veterans, but stated that this occurred in 2000. Furthermore, Mr Sibindi reportedly resigned from ZANU-PF, in March 2003, and denied having plans to join the MDC or having any other political ambitions.¹²

In March 2005, Theminkosi Sibindi was elected as a member of parliament for Hwange East constituency, Matabeleland North province. Sibindi stood as an MDC candidate.¹³ According to an MDC report on the 2005 elections, Mr Sibindi’s campaign underwent the following difficulties:

- Mr Sibindi was barred from campaigning within the Hwange Colliery compound, which consisted of more than three quarters of the Hwange East constituency. The Hwange Colliery Board’s chairman and human resources manager, who were both responsible for issuing the ban on campaigning, reportedly had ties to ZANU-PF.
- Two of Mr Sibindi’s rallies were cancelled, after police permission to hold the rallies was withdrawn.
- A polling agent involved in Mr Sibindi’s campaign was arrested after putting up posters.¹⁴

Approximately three months after his election, Mr Sibindi was ejected from one sitting of parliament for “disrespecting” Zvimba South MP and the president’s sister Sabina Mugabe.¹⁵

⁸ ‘Mob close Victoria Falls border post’ 2001, *IRIN News*, 22 August

<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=25246> – Accessed 13 September 2011

⁹ ‘Mob close Victoria Falls border post’ 2001, *IRIN News*, 22 August

<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=25246> – Accessed 13 September 2011

¹⁰ Thornycroft, P. 2001, ‘Jailed white farmers out on bail after 17 nights’, *The Telegraph*, 23 August

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/zimbabwe/1338313/Jailed-white-farmers-out-on-bail-after-17-nights.html> – Accessed 13 September 2011

¹¹ ‘Amani Trust Report – August 2001’ 2001, *zwnews.com* website, 27 September

<http://zwnews.com/print.cfm?ArticleID=2686> – Accessed 13 September 2011

¹² Nkala, O. 2003, ‘Victoria Falls Deputy Mayor Quits Zanu PF’, *The Zimbabwe Situation* website source: *The Daily News (Harare)*, 21 March http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/mar21a_2003.html#link10 – Accessed 13 September 2011

¹³ Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network 2005, *Report on the Zimbabwe’s 2005 General Election*, April, p. 62

¹⁴ Movement for Democratic Change 2005, *MDC Preliminary Report on March 2005 Parliamentary Elections*, *SW Radio Africa*, 31 March <http://www.swradioafrica.com/Documents/MDCelectionReport.htm> – Accessed 9 September

¹⁵ Motsi, T. 2005, ‘MDC MPs Booted Out’, *All Africa Global Media*, source: *The Herald*, 1 July

In April 2006, the *Zimbabwe Independent* reported that Theminkosi Sibindi was one of several MDC members who had broken away from the mainstream party and joined the MDC-Mutambara (MDC-M) faction. MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai reportedly organised rallies in Hwange East, amongst other areas to “exert pressure” on the defectors.¹⁶ The *Zimbabwe Independent* separately reported that Mr Sibindi was one of several MDC-M members “allegedly making moves to rejoin the Tsvangirai camp” by crossing the floor of parliament. The *Zimbabwe Independent* did not reveal the source(s) of this information.¹⁷

In November 2007, Sibindi reportedly told a journalist that two men who were assaulted in Hwange had been targeted by soldiers and youth militia because they were members of the opposition.¹⁸

No information was located regarding MDC pre-selection for 2008 senate candidates involving Mr Sibindi. However, the International Crisis Group (ICG) reported that in July 2007, the MDC-M faction announced that it would field its own candidates in the 2008 joint parliamentary and presidential elections.¹⁹

Reports state that Theminkosi Sibindi stood as an MDC-M candidate for the House of Assembly, Hwange West constituency (rather than Hwange East), in the 2008 parliamentary elections. He was defeated by an MDC-T candidate named Gift Mabhena.^{20 21} In December 2010, the *Zimbabwe Independent* reported that Theminkosi Sibindi had been appointed as “international relations secretary” to the MDC-T’s Matabeleland North provincial executive. Sibindi’s appointment was one of two appointments to the provincial executive which were made unilaterally by executive leader Sengezo Tshabangu, and not approved by other senior party officials.²² One other member of the provincial executive was suspended after questioning these appointments.²³

¹⁶ Matikinye, R. 2006, ‘Tsvangirai Piles Pressure On Rump Mutambara Group’, *All Africa*, source: *Zimbabwe Independent*, 28 April <http://allafrica.com/stories/200604280636.html> – Accessed 6 October 2009

¹⁷ Mukaro, A. 2006, ‘Mutambara Camp Falls Apart’, *All Africa Global Media*, source: *Zimbabwe Independent*, 21 April

¹⁸ Kandemiiri, J., Rusere, P. & Mwakalyelye, N. 2007, ‘Zimbabwe Opposition’s Tsvangirai Takes Party Pulse on Women’s Crisis’, *Voice of America*, 2 November <http://www.voanews.com/zimbabwe/news/a-13-56-74-2007-11-02-voa56-69000367.html> – Accessed 9 September 2011

¹⁹ International Crisis Group 2007, *Zimbabwe: a Regional Solution?*, Africa Report No. 132, 18 September, p. 11-12

²⁰ ‘Full list of elections candidates’ 2008, *SW Radio Africa*, 3 March

http://www.swradioafrica.com/pages/full_list030308.htm – Accessed 4 July 2011

²¹ Zimbabwe Election Support Network 2008, *Report on the Zimbabwe 29 March Harmonised Election and 27 June 2008 Presidential Run-off*, August p. 87

²² Chitemba, B. 2010, ‘Tsvangirai Fights Factionalism’, *All Africa Global Media*, source: *Zimbabwe Independent*, 10 December

²³ Chitemba, B. 2011, ‘MDC-T fights factionalism before congress’, *Zimbabwe Independent*, 18 February <http://www.theindependent.co.zw/local/29925-mdc-t-fights-factionalism-before-congress.html> – Accessed 14 September 2011

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