

## Civics Gather in Harare, Focus on Zimbabwe

During my work as an intern with the Human Rights Institute of South Africa (HURISA) I got the opportunity to travel to Zimbabwe to a conference jointly organized with the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition and Freedom House South Africa. The aim of the conference was to gather regional civil society organizations together to reflect on the successes and weaknesses of the past strategies they had been using for Zimbabwe and to develop a new consolidated strategy that would be more effective.

With more than 30 participants from human rights organizations representing 12 different countries in attendance, we began by looking at the Global Political Agreement (GPA) that formed the Government of National Unity in Zimbabwe in September 2008. In both local and national media we hear many things about how Zimbabwe violates human rights, so it was very interesting to look at the exact clauses in the law and how they have been adhered to. It was also good to hear first-hand what those working within civil society in Zimbabwe say about what the situation on the ground is like.

By the end of the conference many future strategies had emerged. Some of those include compiling a database of regional CSOs and trying to ensure greater future cooperation between them, as well as a plan to get CSOs from across SADC to jointly try and pressure the South African government to prevent Mugabe from coming to the 2010 soccer world cup.

Overall the conference was a really superb experience and enabled me to see the practical implementation of all the theory we had been learning in our IHRE classes. It was amazing to see how many of the things we had discussed in class were practically relevant. I remember one morning at breakfast discussing the way organizations choose their funding and how different participants said how they preferred to get their funding from this organization or government rather than the other. I immediately thought back to the considerable amount of time we spent in class discussing the funding of rights-based organizations and how the choices they make can impact their credibility.

**HURISA offers professional services towards the promotion of a human rights culture, peace and democracy. Since November 1993, the Institute has offered human rights training courses, disseminated human rights information and conducted research and does advocacy.**

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