

Dr. Walter Mzembi: 20 questions and answers as Foreign Minister Zimbabwe

HARARE, ZIMBABWE, October 30, 2017 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Honorable Dr. Walter Mzembi, Minister of Foreign Affairs Zimbabwe, provided Worldtourismwire a copy of this Q&A first published in the Zimbabwe Daily News.



Question 1.

We are humbled you agreed to this interview.

I granted you this interview on the back of my strong belief that there is space for independent reporting in this country to the extent that it is humane, truthful and accurate, fair and impartial.

Your story of the 24th of October 2017, in all fairness, was a breach of these cardinal principles and bordered on malice. However, I must complement you for your sense of self-accountability in granting me this interview which I hope will inform the public correctly.

“

When people throw you stones, it's because you are a good tree full of fruits”

Hon. Walter Mzembi

Question 2.

Are you bitter about the bad press?

Bad press sells. However, there is always the flip side which is the positive in the degree of awareness and free publicity that

it brings around issues and personalities. The wiser seize the opportunity to turn that adversity into an opportunity, hence the saying “when given lemons make lemonade”. I have lived this principle in the Tourism Ministry and the results are what you publicly acknowledge as a successful stint.

When people throw you stones, it's because you are a good tree full of fruits. They see a lot of harvest in you. Don't go to their level by throwing them back the stones, but throw them your fruits so the seeds of yourself may inspire them to change their ways.”

On the perceived bumpy landing, quite to the contrary, the landing has been a soft one because my deployment in Tourism has been the forerunner and an extension of foreign relations and diplomacy. My only remaining task is to convert my Tourism legacy into statecraft.

Question 3.

Will you have a new Foreign Policy Whitepaper?

Our Foreign Policy is already in place and the prerogative of the President. He set the parameters of the country's Foreign Policy way back in 1980 when he enunciated our policy of national reconciliation urging us to "turn swords into ploughshares".

My favourite Prophet Isaiah, in Chapter 2 verse 4, himself the philosophical source of this prophetic statement by the President says "The Lord will mediate between nations and settle international disputes. They will hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into hooks. Nation will no longer fight against nation or train for war any more" This is the basis of contemporary diplomacy.

It is therefore not my duty to invent the wheel, so to speak, but rather to ensure that the wheel can tackle effectively all the different terrain that it must of necessity travel. Consequently therefore, it is incumbent upon my ministry to ensure that Zimbabwe's Foreign Policy is implemented effectively in the given atmosphere and in realising our national interests.

As is the case in other countries, Zimbabwe's Foreign Policy seeks to advance the country's domestic policy objectives on the international stage. To that extent, our Foreign Policy is an extension of our domestic policy.

The tenets of our national interests are self-preservation, the protection and enhancement of the country's image, the prosperity and welfare of our people, preservation of peace and national cohesion, and peaceful good neighbourliness.

My mandate is therefore to advance the country's Foreign Policy that has been enunciated by the President, and agreed to in Government. There is no "Mzembi Foreign Policy". The difference is only in style of delivery.

Question 4.

You have been a front-line diplomat for Zimbabwe for almost 10 years. What are your foreign policy priorities?

Overall our Foreign Policy will be both dynamic and responsive to the ever changing world. Our thrust would be the opening of new frontiers of diplomatic relations, nursing and nurturing old friendships, rapprochement and robust re-engagement and economic diplomacy. We envisage cultivating support of our diasporans in investment and remittances.

Public diplomacy will take centre stage in particular the need to signpost "zero tolerance to violence" as we approach the 2018 elections. Hate speech now constitutes the major component of violence of citizens against each other, and should be outlawed.

We are looking forward to dialogue with those countries that have disengaged from us, re-forge beneficial relations anew. We also want to reposition the country in order to make it more attractive to foreign investors.

My vision is to see Zimbabwe emerging from the current estrangement both in terms of Government to Government contact and broader economic relations further afield. The key pillars of my tenancy will thus essentially be strengthening relations with old friends, establishing new frontiers of cooperation, re-engagement and rebranding the country to be an attractive investment destination. We must become a better place to invest in than is currently the case.

Achieving these milestones will not be without headwinds.

Question 5.

There is a sense that the Foreign Affairs Ministry wasn't delivering in some areas. How will you help your diplomats around the world?

The national debt issue is a matter of public record. Therefore treating Foreign Affairs indebtedness in isolation could be misplaced as it is a microcosm of the global picture.

The solution to this problem is not only in thinking outside the box but in discarding the box.

We should be exploring other innovative ways of self-sustenance and I have many creative solutions to this problem which cannot be brought into the public domain.

Question 6.

At least 12 Zimbabwe diplomatic missions were sued over salary arrears for staff; some have been put under legal notice for eviction over unpaid rentals. The parliamentary committee on Foreign Affairs recommended government reduce the foreign missions to a sustainable number. What is your reaction?

Reducing the number of our Embassies is a short term kneejerk solution as those Embassies and Consulates were established to serve specific interests. We might decide to close down Embassy "X" only to discover that a few years down the line we would need such an Embassy for strategic reasons.

It is an established fact that where countries in such situations have closed their embassies, the cost of re-establishing them has been greater than the cost of having left them operational.

Our Missions are already streamlined given that we have at least 192 countries and territories that have to be serviced, and what we have is already a small number in this global interdependent world of today.

In fact, quite to the contrary, in line with my policy thrust of reactivating lost friendships and opening new frontiers and in pursuit of our goal in economic diplomacy, there would actually be a case for expansion. The world is bigger than our colonial history. Our current realities far outweigh the spread of our diplomatic missions.

We have zero to minimal representation in some regions such as Latin America, the Pacific, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Our thrust of economic diplomacy dictates that we open new frontiers of representation.

I shall certainly be recommending a new matrix of representation to the President that may include streamlining in some regions and reinforcing in others as well as opening up new frontiers.

Question 7.

What are the challenges ahead?

I don't want to add to the list of cry-babies. The laundry list is the opportunities ahead of us.

Question 8.

How did your UNWTO campaign prepare you for this job?

My tenure at the Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality Industry was a good fortuitous training ground for this new post. I engaged various constituencies during my leadership of the Zimbabwe delegation to the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly between 2004 and 2006 when we were fighting the imposition of sanctions on the country by the EU.

Campaigning for the post of Secretary General of the UNWTO enabled me to engage over 80 governments worldwide, during which travels I met Presidents, Vice Presidents, Prime Ministers, and Foreign Ministers as I sought their support.

I have also had the opportunity to interact and exchange ideas with eminent personalities amongst them former Foreign Secretaries of the UK and the USA. (Including Jack Straw and David Miliband and Hilary Clinton). My conversations with them has enlightened me on opportunities for future mutually beneficial engagements.

This has certainly prepared me for my current post and I am confident that with the support of my experienced Ministry staff, we will achieve our stated goals.

In hindsight, the UNWTO was an exercise in the magnification of my acquired skills which perhaps could have caught the attention of the appointing authority and its attendant Cabinet Commendation.

Question 9.

What happened in Montevideo?

In brief, African delegates to the Conference, and they included Angola, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Niger, Sao Tome and Principe, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe requested me to engage the WHO on their behalf and seek the appointment of the President as the Goodwill Ambassador for Africa. I must applaud the WHO Director General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, for the initial bravery which led him after his own internal consultations, to accede to the request which he communicated to the Minister of Health and myself before the commencement of the High Level Forum that he would be announcing the designation of the President to this honorary role.

With all good intentions we informed the President accordingly. Thereafter, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus proudly announced and justified the appointment of the President with the attendant citation. What we perhaps underestimated was the backlash. Little did we know that there were other constituencies with other convictions concerning this issue. The rest is now water under the bridge.

Question 10.

Do you feel you were justified to lobby for President Mugabe to be WHO ambassador?

I was approached by the African constituency at the meeting, and for me, it made sense then and now, and there are no regrets. The President does not require to be bestowed an honour in the pursuit of his principles and convictions. He successfully advocated, lobbied and resource mobilised for the Ebola affected countries in West Africa at the UN in 2015 without this designation. As I speak, he will carry on with his agenda on NCDs on behalf of Africa notwithstanding. It was not about the honour, it was about saving lives in line with SDG Goal 3, target 3.4, which implores us to reduce, by

one third, premature mortality from NCDs through prevention and treatment and promoting mental health and wellbeing.

Question 11.

Was this a government position or your own initiative?

I am part of government and any action by my Ministry is within the context of a collegiate.

Question 12.

Did you discuss with the President that you were lobbying on his behalf for this post?

I have already answered this question. However, let me reiterate that as Minister of Foreign Affairs, I am the lead advocate for my President and country's brand.

Question 13.

With this fall-out, do you think you did the right thing?

Absolutely, any perceived fall-out is imaginary.

Question 14.

Presidential spokesman George Charamba has sharply contradicted you on this award. What is your reaction to that?

I am not aware of any contradictions. Mr Charamba was part of our delegation and in fact his media team was responsible for information dissemination from Uruguay which is a matter of public record.

Question 15.

Does government genuinely support the fight against NCDs given that Charamba has said we are a tobacco producing nation, and we cannot join the WHO campaign against tobacco, or smoking? Is it government policy to continue producing tobacco because of its foreign currency earning power even though tobacco is killing 7,000 Zimbabweans through NCDs such as cancer every year?

Zimbabwe is a signatory to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) and its economy is transitioning to alternatives. However, in the interim, we will continue to strictly observe the set guidelines in the production and trading of tobacco. FCTC does not abruptly stop production and trade in tobacco, but puts guidelines for countries like Zimbabwe for which tobacco is part of its economic mainstay.

I urge you as journalists to be fully conversant with this and other international conventions in order to disseminate correct information and facts to your constituency.

Question 16.

It seems government is speaking with a forked tongue on this, what is the problem?

In international relations, forked tongues are a function of national interest in the pursuit of diplomacy. I would urge you to do your own research on forked tongues by some other international players at

and within other multilateral agencies (the Paris Climate Change Agreement, NAFTA, Iran Nuclear Deal, UNESCO, just to name a few). You don't seem to be interested in interrogating the bigger powers at the centre of these Agreements. You undermine your national interest at the slightest excuse.

Question 17.

Can you outline your vision for Zimbabwe's diplomatic engagement with Western countries?

This is what the President had to say in April 1980 about Lord Soames, the last colonial Governor of the then Rhodesia, "I must admit that I was one of those who originally never trusted him, and yet I have now ended up not only implicitly trusting but fondly loving him as well"

This is the personal relationship between him and the Soames family. Sir Nicholas Soames himself was tracing the footprints of his father. If this brings us political capital in the direction of political rapprochement and engagement, then it is welcome. Zimbabwe still maintains diplomatic relations with western countries and in fact, going forward, as I have indicated, we will soon embark on robust diplomatic engagement with all countries that we have diplomatic relations with, including western countries.

I shall shortly be meeting all the Ambassadors accredited to Zimbabwe to share my policy thrust going forward and our expectations of them. Equally, I shall engage our Missions abroad with the same objective.

Everything is diplomacy and the diplomacy deficit in our interactions is going to be a thing of the past.

Question 18.

Some people say President Mugabe is a hard-sell product in international diplomacy, what is your take?

A "hard sell" does not win elections consecutively every time they are due. This "hard sell", according to you will break the Guinness Book of Records when he cruises to victory yet again in the forthcoming elections. Our homework is conversion of his domestic and continental appeal into acceptance by specific sections of the international community hence the policy thrust that I have already outlined.

Question 19.

What type of relationship do you have with the President?

The President is the father figure of the entire nation, and that's how we all relate to him. My colleagues and I in Cabinet feel greatly indebted to the President to continue to serve in this capacity under his leadership which is a rare privilege. No matter how great one was born to be, someone has to release you.

Question 20.

Will your Foreign Policy thrust take him on-board?

There is no Foreign Policy thrust which excludes the Head of State. Do not expect me to park my president at a layby.

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