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IBPP Research Associates: Zimbabwe

Staff Writer - Standard Online (Zimbabwe)

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-----Public laughs off 'three-day mourning'

The general public yesterday laughed off President Robert Mugabe's declaration of three days of mourning for the late Democratic Republic of the Congo leader, Laurent Kabila.

Most people interviewed by The Standard in a survey dismissed Mugabe's declaration, saying he was demeaning the people of Zimbabwe.

What appeared to irk most people was that Mugabe had the nerve to refuse the late Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole, one of the founding fathers of the liberation struggle, national hero status, and yet had gone overboard by ordering Zimbabweans to mourn Kabila, in whose war Zimbabwe has lost billions of dollars and many soldiers.

The declaration, they said, showed that Mugabe was bent on honouring his personal friends, even those who had done nothing for Zimbabwe and at the same time "despising true Zimbabwean heroes because of petty differences".

Ironically, Mugabe's decision to order Zimbabweans to officially mourn Kabila has been countered by a significant number of people publicly rejoicing over the death of the rebel turned president.

Nomatter Phiri of Highfield felt that since the deployment of Zimbabwean soldiers was a unilateral decision, trying to force the three day mourning period down peoples' throats would not work: "The three days of mourning have no significance to the people of Zimbabwe considering that when Zanu PF made a decision to send our soldiers to DRC it was a party decision, not a peoples' decision. So why must the public be involved in the mourning of a person whose country has cost us so much against our will?"

Painos Mahari of Mabelreign questioned why the late Kabila is being given special treatment yet some national heroes have died recently and no recognition was given.

Said Mahari: "What part did Kabila play in the liberation of Zimbabwe? Known heroes like Ndabaningi Sithole and Enoch Dumbutshena were totally ignored by Zanu PF, which went on to ignore the public's disgruntlement over their arrogance to refuse the two national hero status."

Also not happy with Mugabe's decision was Nomathemba of Nyameni in Marondera, who said: "Mugabe must explain to the nation what criteria he used to declare this man some sort of national hero. We are now confused."

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Another disgruntled citizen, Sekai Gambe of Mufakose, had no kind words for the President. Said Gambe: "Mugabe thinks he owns the people of this country, which is why he thinks he can ignore the public's feelings. That is why he makes these strange unilateral decisions. This three-day mourning period is a waste of time because it does not have the emotional attachment that should come with it. Flags will fly at half mast but deep inside people just do not care."

Movement for Democratic Change shadow minister for foreign affairs, Tendai Biti, said in a statement that although his party regretted the departure of the late DRC President Laurent Kabila, his party has met the announced three days of mourning with outrage and disbelief.

Said Biti: "Kabila was a non-elected dictator who came to power through force. The DRC itself is not in mourning over his death and for Zimbabwe, a democratic nation to mourn Kabila is offensive to the principles of democracy."

Biti added that President Mugabe's offensive and repugnant actions are an insult to justice, freedom and to the ideals of democratic presidency that he is supposed to embody.

He said that his party declares these three days a time for the nation to reflect on Zimbabwean troops in the DRC, to mourn the soldiers the country has lost and to pray for the immediate return of Zimbabwean forces home. (Keywords: Kabila, Mourning, Mugabe, Zimbabwe.)