

# Exclusive: Interview with Makoni

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Exclusive: Interview with Makoni

FinGaz

Simba Makoni's announcement last week that he would stand as an independent presidential candidate has whipped up strong public interest, and also brought tough scrutiny of his strategy.

Here, in his first interview since announcing his candidacy, Makoni speaks to The Financial Gazette News Editor Rangarirai Mberi about part of his strategy, his meeting with President Mugabe, and his chances at the polls. Excerpts: Rangarirai Mberi (RM): At what point did you decide to run for President? Simba Makoni (SM): July 2007.

RM: Any significance to the timing?

SM: That was after the President had announced, in March, long before any of the processes required for one to take leadership of the party had been set in motion, that he would lead the party into the next election. I then convinced myself that we needed urgent renewal, that we needed to move to bring about that renewal.

RM: And then what did you do? SM: I began that process of consultation with a wide cross-section of people, from those within ZANU-PF and those outside.

RM: Your meeting with President Mugabe, what exactly did you talk about? SM: I went to tell the President that there were views in the party that there was now need for a renewal of the party, a renewal of the leadership in the party and the country, and that there was a feeling that this should come from within the party. I was frank with him, and I told him that I was prepared to stand as President, and that there were people who supported my decision to move in.

RM: And how did he react? SM: He took note.

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RM: What do you mean, exactly? SM: He took note of what I had told him.

RM: He could have told you he was elected at the December congress? SM: That's a question you would have to ask him.

RM: Well, he was elected as ZANU–PF President in December? SM: Let me tell you this. When the full facts of the processes that led to that congress are made public, people would understand why this decision has been necessary. You should ask the legal secretary, the secretary for administration and the political commissar.

RM: But these people that you say you consulted, from inside ZANU–PF, that you say support you, where are they? Who are they, and why are they not coming out in the open to back your bid? SM: Let me talk about this notion that people have, this belief that I was ever going to parade people in front of the cameras. My consultation was not only with people in the leadership of ZANU–PF. I have consulted with the grassroots, broad consultations, with all the people of Zimbabwe. That's what matters. I have stood for hours in cash queues with the ordinary people, I know first hand of the tribulations they suffer, standing out there for hours just so you can withdraw a measly \$5 million. That's a large part of the consultations I did. I do not understand it when I come out and say our crisis is the result of failure of our national leadership, and people still expect to see me parade some of this very same leadership responsible for these same failures. Wouldn't that be a contradiction? The people that matter are those that are going to come out on March 29 to deliver a verdict.

RM: Which top ZANU–PF officials approached you to launch this challenge? SM: Let me emphasise this. I was not put up to this by anybody. I had views of my own, that we were long overdue for a change of leadership. And so I found that there was some significant support for that change.

RM: Why did you stay this long in the party, evidently the rot had already set in much earlier than July 2007? You could have left earlier. SM: If you look at the record of all my public pronouncements, from the years that I served in government, and other public pronouncements I have made since leaving government, you will realise what I have always been about. I wanted to see a return to our original principles as a party and a nation, the values under which the President said at independence that we must turn our swords into plough–shares, the effort to establish an equitable and prosperous society. I believe those values are

still relevant up to now. It is that deviation from these values by the leadership that we now seek to reverse. So, until the last minute, I had continued to work for a return to those original values. Zimbabwe is a country that has a history, but it must also have a future. And so I persevered inside the party only in the hope that there would be some renewal of our party.

RM: How do rate your chances? SM: Judging by the responses we have had since our announcement last Tuesday, we are heading for a landslide win. We have reports voter registration is up ten-fold since last Tuesday. The enthusiasm is palpable. I do not anticipate anything short of a landslide.

RM: Even for the rural vote? SM: Why do we always want to categorise our people? Why do we herd them into paddocks? All of them are Zimbabweans, and all of them yearn for the same thing, which is an immediate renewal of our country. Please, we should not create unnatural barriers.

RM: You have already been criticised for being vague on policy and strategy. SM: What I will not do is make high-sounding promises to the people of Zimbabwe. I want to emphasise this. I am not going to give you a reel of menus and recipes. What I am offering the people of this country is an opportunity to make changes, real empowerment. I am not going to stand in front of the people and say, "I will build a road here, I will build a house here, a dam there". I cannot make such promises. There are 14 million Zimbabweans, and what I am about is offering each one of them the chance to once again make the best out of their opportunities, a chance to realise their full potential. This government made many lofty promises, but it was a fallacy to believe any of these would be delivered. That should be a key lesson.

RM: So how would you turn around the economy? SM: Our priority obviously would be to get our land and our factories producing again. We could get all the fertiliser from China, India, and so on, but the key task would be to get our own Zimbabwean companies producing again. Manufacturing capacity utilisation is down, primarily because companies cannot source raw materials. There will be a need for a technological renewal of our industry, we need to recapitalise our factories. But any modicum of recovery would require a fresh supply of inputs; no big task. But the most important thing we would need to do is to get our people re-engaged, to restore their confidence, such that there will be no need for a parallel market, or the need to pretend that there is a formal market when it no longer exists. This economy can still be turned around.

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RM: Morgan Tsvangirai says you are old wine in a new bottle. SM:  
I really do not think we should delve into trivialities. I  
wish we could move from trivial matters into matters of  
substance.

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