

= Geneva Conference (1976) =

The Geneva Conference (28 October ? 14 December 1976) took place in Geneva , Switzerland during the Rhodesian Bush War . Held under British mediation , its participants were the unrecognised government of Rhodesia , led by Ian Smith , and a number of rival Rhodesian black nationalist parties : the African National Council , led by Bishop Abel Muzorewa ; the Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe , led by James Chikerema ; and a joint " Patriotic Front " made up of Robert Mugabe 's Zimbabwe African National Union and the Zimbabwe African People 's Union led by Joshua Nkomo . The purpose of the conference was to attempt to agree on a new constitution for Rhodesia and in doing so find a way to end the Bush War raging between the government and the guerrillas commanded by Mugabe and Nkomo respectively .

The Geneva Conference had its origins in the South African " détente " policy instituted in late 1974 , and more directly in the peace initiative headed by the United States Secretary of State , Henry Kissinger , earlier in 1976 . After the Kissinger plan was rejected by the nationalists , talks were organised in Geneva by Britain to try to salvage a deal . The proceedings began on 28 October 1976 , eight days behind schedule , and were chaired by a British mediator , Ivor Richard , who offended both delegations before the conference even started . When Richard read an opening statement from British Prime Minister James Callaghan which referred to the country as " Zimbabwe " , the nationalists were somewhat placated , while Smith 's team was insulted yet further . Little progress was made during the two sides ' discussions , causing the conference to be indefinitely adjourned on 14 December 1976 . It was never reconvened .

= = Background = =

Following a dispute over the terms for the granting of full statehood , the predominantly white minority government of Rhodesia , headed by Prime Minister Ian Smith , unilaterally declared independence from Britain on 11 November 1965 . Because British Prime Minister Harold Wilson and Whitehall had been insisting on an immediate transfer to majority rule before independence , this declaration went unrecognised and caused Britain and the United Nations (UN) to impose economic sanctions on Rhodesia .

The two most prominent black nationalist parties in Rhodesia were the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) ? a predominantly Shona movement , influenced by Chinese Maoism ? and the Zimbabwe African People 's Union (ZAPU) , which was Marxist ? Leninist , and mostly Ndebele . ZANU and its military wing , the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) , received considerable backing in training , materiel and finances from the People 's Republic of China and its allies , while the Warsaw Pact and associated nations , prominently Cuba , gave similar support to ZAPU and its Zimbabwe People 's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) . ZAPU and ZIPRA were headed by Joshua Nkomo throughout their existence , while the Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole founded and initially led ZANU . The two rival nationalist movements launched what they called their " Second Chimurenga " against the Rhodesian government and security forces during the mid @-@ 1960s . The army , air force and police successfully repulsed numerous guerrilla incursions , most of which were perpetrated by ZIPRA , over the rest of that decade .

After abortive talks between Smith and Wilson in 1966 and 1968 , a constitution was agreed upon by the Rhodesian and British governments in November 1971 ; however , when a British test of Rhodesian public opinion was undertaken in early 1972 , black opinion was judged to be against the new deal , causing it to be shelved . The Rhodesian Bush War suddenly re @-@ erupted in December 1972 , after two years of relative inactivity , when ZANLA attacked Altena and Whistlefield Farms in north @-@ eastern Rhodesia . After a successful security force counter @-@ campaign during 1973 and 1974 , drastic changes in the foreign policy of the Rhodesian government 's two main backers , Portugal and South Africa , caused the conflict 's momentum to shift in the nationalists ' favour . In April 1974 , the Portuguese government was overthrown by a military coup and replaced with a leftist administration in favour of ending the unpopular Colonial War in Angola , Mozambique and Portugal 's other African territories .

The institution by Pretoria of a détente initiative in late 1974 forced a ceasefire in Rhodesia , and in June 1975 Mozambique became independent from Portugal under a communist government allied with ZANU . Unsuccessful rounds of talks were held between the Rhodesian government and the nationalists , united under the banner of Abel Muzorewa 's African National Council , across the Victoria Falls Bridge in August 1975 , then directly between the government and ZAPU starting in December 1975 . Around this time , Robert Mugabe replaced Sithole as ZANU leader , winning an internal leadership election which Sithole refused to recognise . Guerrilla incursions picked up strongly in the first months of 1976 , leading Smith to declare on the evening of 6 February 1976 that " a new terrorist offensive has begun and , to defeat it , Rhodesians will have to face heavier military commitments . " Security force reports indicated that around 1 @, @ 000 insurgent fighters were active within Rhodesia , with a further 15 @, @ 000 encamped in various states of readiness in Mozambique .

= = Prelude : Kissinger initiative = =

The United States Secretary of State , Henry Kissinger , announced a formal interest in the Rhodesian situation in February 1976 , and spent the rest of the year holding discussions with the British , South African and Frontline governments to produce a mutually satisfactory proposal . The plan that Kissinger eventually presented would give a transition period of two years before majority rule began , during which time an interim government would take control while a specially convened " council of state " , made up of three whites , three blacks and a white chairman , drew up a new constitution . This constitution would have to result in majority rule at the end of the two @- @ year interim period . This plan was supported by Kenneth Kaunda and Julius Nyerere , the presidents of Zambia and Tanzania respectively , which South African Prime Minister B. J. Vorster said guaranteed its acceptance by the black nationalists . Vorster had no reply when Smith ventured that he had said the same thing before the Victoria Falls talks in 1975 , when Kaunda and Nyerere had agreed on no preconditions for talks , then allowed the nationalists to seek them .

Smith met Kissinger in Pretoria on 18 September 1976 to discuss the terms . The American diplomat told the prime minister that although he was obliged to take part , his participation in what he termed the " demise of Rhodesia " was " one of the great tragedies of my life " . All the same , he encouraged Smith strongly to accept the deal he placed on the table , though he knew it was unpalatable , as any future offer could only be worse . Western opinion was already " soft and decadent " , Kissinger warned , and would become even more so if , as projected , American President Gerald Ford lost that year 's presidential election to Jimmy Carter . A session including Kissinger , Smith and Vorster then began , and here Smith relayed his concern that his acceptance could be perceived by the Rhodesian electorate as " selling out " and could cause a mass exodus of skilled workers and investment , which would in turn severely damage the country 's economy . Vorster requested a break in the session and took Smith 's team into a private side @- @ room , accompanied by South African Foreign Minister Hilgard Muller . There he privately informed Smith that it was no longer viable for South Africa to support Rhodesia financially and militarily , and that Smith should make up his mind quickly and announce his acceptance that evening . This ultimatum deeply shocked the Rhodesian team ; two of Smith 's ministers , Desmond Lardner @- @ Burke and Jack Mussett , were unable to contain their anger and vociferously berated the South African prime minister for his " irresponsibility " , leading Vorster to rise from his seat without a word and leave the room .

The Rhodesians were then summoned back out into the main lounge , where Kissinger insisted that their prime minister sit next to him . " Ian Smith made accepting the deal worse by acting like a gentleman , " the American later said . Vorster opened the discussion by announcing that he had applied no pressure to the Rhodesian delegates , which caused further consternation amongst the Rhodesians which they had difficulty suppressing . It was agreed that the Rhodesians should return to Salisbury and consult their cabinet , then announce their answer . Despite expressing " incredulity " at what had happened in Pretoria , and showing deep reluctance , the politicians in Salisbury resolved that despite what they perceived as " South African treachery " the responsible course of

action could only be to go on with the peace process , and that meant accepting Kissinger 's terms , which they agreed were better than any they could get in the future should they refuse . Smith announced his government 's answer on the evening of 24 September 1976 : " Yes . " South Africa 's wavering financial and military assistance suddenly became available again , but the Frontline States then abruptly changed tact and turned the Kissinger terms down , saying that any interim period before majority rule was unacceptable . A new constitutional conference in Geneva , Switzerland was hastily organised by Britain to try to salvage something from the wreckage , with 20 October 1976 set as the start date .

= = Geneva Conference = =

ZANU and ZAPU announced on 9 October that they would attend this conference and any thereafter as a joint " Patriotic Front " (PF) , including members of both parties under a combined leadership . Kaunda and Nyerere welcomed the new negotiations , but with the Soviet Union proposing that they once again alter their line , the talks were delayed indefinitely . In an attempt to encourage the other parties to travel to Switzerland , British mediator Ivor Richard asked the Rhodesian delegation to hasten their arrival , which they did , leaving Salisbury on 20 October 1976 . Richard himself did not arrive until two days later . Some of the guerrillas arriving for the conference from the heat of Mozambique were unprepared for the Swiss winter : Rex Nhongo , for example , felt so cold that he turned every heating appliance in his room , including the stove , to maximum and went to sleep . When the room caught fire , he was forced to jump from the balcony in his pyjamas .

Even arranging the conference proved a struggle , with the Rhodesians taking exception to being served cards of admittance on 27 October denoting them " The Smith Delegation " , rather than the " Rhodesian Government Delegation " as had happened in previous conferences and correspondence . The Rhodesians unilaterally altered their cards to this effect , then confronted Richard with them , causing him some shock . The conference was eventually arranged to commence on 28 October at 15 : 00 , but at very short notice the British mediator delayed the start for two hours ; some Patriotic Front delegates were questioning his role as chairman and threatening not to attend , and Richard hoped to talk them around in the extra time . When the parties finally met , some hours later than planned , Muzorewa sat opposite Smith as the leader of the nationalist delegates , as at Victoria Falls , but with empty seats directly either side of him , marked " Comrade Enos Nkala " and " Comrade Edson Sithole " respectively ? each of these ZANU cadres had refused to attend the opening meeting despite Richard 's entreaties . The mediator read an opening statement from British Prime Minister James Callaghan which , to the nationalists ' delight and the government 's chagrin , referred to the country as " Zimbabwe " . The proceedings were then adjourned , to start again the next day .

On the morning of 29 October , Mugabe and Nkomo spoke in turn , giving emotionally charged speeches about the " dreadful sacrifices which the white governments have exacted from the poor black people " . Neither made any comment relevant to a new constitution . Muzorewa then told the story of the life of the Ndebele King Lobengula in reverent tones , before Sithole made the only directly relevant nationalist contribution of the day , saying simply that he hoped the two sides could come to an agreement . A few days ' break were then agreed as constitutional lawyers drew up a plan based on Kissinger 's for the delegates to discuss . The American election result came through on the morning of 2 November 1976 ; as expected , Carter had won . In Geneva , meanwhile , it soon became clear that while the Rhodesians wished to stick to the plan they had agreed with Kissinger , the nationalists had no intention of doing so , regarding those terms only as a starting point for further negotiation . They continually interrupted the lawyers ' work with new demands , meaning that by 8 November practically no progress had been made .

A meeting was organised for the next day , 9 November : the chaotic parley led nowhere , with the nationalists once again taking turns to make long , irrelevant speeches while the Rhodesians attempted to have Richard return the subject to the new constitution . Smith , who had earlier supported Richard as mediator in the face of the nationalists ' criticism , became very frustrated by

Richard 's refusal to be firm with the PF and restore order to the proceedings . Unproductive discussions continued for another month , with Mugabe persistently arriving late to the meetings . When Rhodesian minister P K van der Byl confronted Mugabe about his tardiness and tersely demanded an apology , the ZANU leader became enraged and screamed , " Foul @-@ mouthed bloody fool ! "

= = Abandonment = =

Finally , on 14 December 1976 , British Foreign Minister Anthony Crosland announced that the conference was to be adjourned . It was never reconvened ? the Patriotic Front now said that it would not return to Geneva or take part in any further talks unless immediate black rule was made the only subject for discussion . Apparently believing that the British and Rhodesians were secretly working together to prevent this , Nkomo laid down pre @-@ conditions for any new conference . " The Rhodesian situation is a war situation ... On our side it is the Patriotic Front , and on the British ... side it is the British government with the Rhodesian régime as [its] extension The agenda must have only one item ... the transfer of power from the minority to the majority . This means a constitution based on universal adult suffrage This item should take four to five days . "