**The ZEP permits**

*By Oswald Kucherera*

 Yesterday,

I was overwhelmed with great joy,

beaming with an innocent smile,

when the ZEP permits were issued.

I felt like screaming on top of my lungs like a child,

carefree,

filled with unbridled happiness.

A giant step towards freedom and unity,

the common ground of the founding fathers and mothers of African independence.

My spirit had finally found peace,

And I could walk tall brimming with self-confidence.

No longer at tenterhooks with the authorities,

my heart throbbing at the speed of the sound of sirens,

on the sight of police officers

Or the Home Affairs officials.

I remain an outsider,

It doesn't count,

I learnt to speak the language.

I carry with me my blackness

everywhere I go,

but it's not enough passport,

in the eyes of the authorities.

I had regained my dignity,

lost when I crossed the borders

And rendered illegal immigrant

on the African soil

the home of Ubuntu.

It was all a sweet escape from crass tyranny

And abject poverty

trying to stay alive,

And keep the home fires burning,

chasing away the cat from the fireplace.

The fascist regime back home,

plunged the promising country into a basket case,

And failed to find the panacea to the hemorrhaging economy

And the citizens are scattered in forlorn exile.

Descending voices,

are callously thrown behind bars,

Or disappear without trace.

August, the beginning of spring, never forgot

6 unarmed protesters gunned down on streets of Harare,

suffered a brutal death at the hands of the soldiers,

despots clinging on to power; at all cost.

When the ZEP permits were issued,

The African gods had answered my prayers

I could finally walk freely on the streets,

apply for a decent job,

earn a decent income,

And afford to send remittances back home.

I was determined to employ my knowledge and skills,

And put them to optimum use,

in the development

and betterment of humankind.

I remember the humiliation I was subjected to roaming the streets undocumented,

the exploitation,

the desperation,

the perpetual fear of deportation,

the constant rage,

the miserable wage,

in the belly of the beasts,

sucking my blood dry,

seeking to reap of large profits.

When I finally got the ZEP permit,

I was ravished this was all in the past,

the end of the trials and tribulations,

the beginning of the new.

I perceived it will be different

and the agony will be gone.

I never asked much

I only needed a little to feed and clothe my family

and sustain education for my offspring,

looking after the old and ailing back home.

Today,

I feel like I am at a brink

descending back to the squalor.

Every day I drink,

copious amounts of liquor.

I have very little time to clearly think,

Drinking has become my refuge,

my coping mechanism

Or escapism.

The growing uncertainty,

friendships,

relationships,

the small life I had built here

in my second home.

the uncertainty eats deep in my system like a disease

the dashing hopes and dreams

the future

the unpredictable future and its features.

the unseen obstacle threatens to crumble down

The self-esteem and self-confidence

slowly dimming.

The ZEP permit breathed life in me

and gave me the power of free will

And like an eagle

I could soar to depth heights

high up in the sky.

Tomorrow,

looks promising.

Winter is slowly coming to an end,

marking the birth of new season,

ushering in a splendid summer.

Reason will finally prevail

And the ZEP permits will be renewed.

****

**Oswald Kucherera** is an avid reader, short story writer, poet, novelist and pan-Africanist activist currently residing in Cape Town. He is an author of the best-selling self-published novella, *The Exodus Down South* (2016) and *Washing Dishes and Other Stories* (2018). His work is published in various publications including Sleeping Giants Awakes (2018) and *Migrants, Thinkers, Storytellers* (2021). He is a contributing writer for FUNDZA, an online publication. In 2017 and 2018 he participated as a panelist in the prestigious Open Book Festival. In 2022 he participated as a panelist in Blown Away By Books Festival at Fish Hoek Library. He has a passion for photography and travelling.