

Zimbabwe update

Welcome to the new look Zimbabwe update. January witnessed the political parties agreeing to participate in a government of national unity following the SADC summit of 26 January. Whether the agreement holds and whether ordinary Zimbabweans feel the benefits, time will tell. In this update we draw attention to the ongoing lives and struggles of ordinary Zimbabweans.

This issue looks at the continued detention of Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and human rights activists, and the trial of Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) leaders Jenni Williams and Magodonga Mahlangu. We also highlight the Student Solidarity Trust "Against all Odds" awards and the launch of an International Labour Organisation (ILO) investigation into human rights abuses into trade unionists

You can find more details about all of the stories covered on the [ACTSA website](#).

SADC holds further Extraordinary Summit on Zimbabwe

SADC held a further Extraordinary Summit on 26 January to discuss the implementation of Zimbabwe's power sharing agreement, the GPA. The [Communiqué](#) issued at the end of the talks put a timeline in place for the formation of a government with a Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister sworn in by 11 February. The document leaves issues like control of the home affairs ministry and the detention of civil society activists and MDC members to be dealt with once a government has been established.

On 29 January ZCTU and COSATU responded to the Summit with a [statement on the crisis in Zimbabwe](#).

MDC Tsvangirai announced on 30 January that he had agreed to participate in a government of national unity. You can read [ACTSA's position on the unity government of Zimbabwe](#) online.

Abducted activists appear in court

32 MDC and human rights activists remain in solitary confinement in Zimbabwe's jails. A group of 8 abductees including Jestina Mukoko appeared in court on 24 December and were charged with "recruiting or attempt to recruit individuals for training in banditry, insurgency, sabotage or terrorism" while a separate group of 7 abductees will be charged in connection with a number of bombings in Harare in 2008. Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights claim that all those detained should be immediately released as "each one of them is a victim of abduction and forced disappearance by state agents. None of them was arrested in terms of the law." Affidavits submitted to the courts state that the detainees have been tortured, acts of torture have included being beaten on the feet and forced to kneel on gravel for hours.

News in Brief

- Z\$100 trillion bank notes have been issued just days after a Z\$50 billion note came into circulation.
- The European Union extended targeted measures to a further 27 individuals and 36 companies.
- UNICEF has agreed to provide a \$5 million fund to provide salaries for Zimbabwe's health workers.
- South Africa has released a R300 million aid package for Zimbabwe.

Cholera epidemic “not under control”

On 23 January the United Nations (UN) put deaths from cholera at 2,773 people out of 50,000 infections. Cholera is now reported in all 10 of Zimbabwe’s provinces. Experts predict that the rainy season is likely to spread the disease further. By the end of the month the number of cases had gone beyond the “nightmare scenario” of 60,000 cases with over 3,000 dead. UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon said “The current cholera epidemic is only the most visible manifestation of a profound multi-sectoral crisis, encompassing food, agriculture, education, health, water, sanitation and HIV/AIDS.”

Student Solidarity Trust holds “Against all Odds” awards.

The Zimbabwe Student Solidarity Trust held its annual ‘Against all Odds’ award on 24 January. The awards celebrated 11 students who have been able to complete their studies despite arbitrary arrests, torture, expulsions and suspensions. The students have been helped to complete their studies at alternative institutions outside Zimbabwe by the Social Safety Net programme. The programme is currently assisting 64 other students and 24 others are currently studying in the Netherlands under a scholarship programme for Zimbabwean students in distress.

ILO investigate human rights abuses

The ILO has launched an investigation into allegations that the government of Zimbabwe has breached the rights of workers and trade unionists to organise and assemble freely. The move follows complaints of arrest, detention, harassment and intimidation lodged by workers and trade union at the June 2008 International Labour Conference.

Women of Zimbabwe Arise in Court

The trial of Jenni Williams and Magodonga Mahlangu leaders of [WOZA](#) began on 28 January. They have been told they must stand trial on charges of disturbing the peace after a magistrate dismissed defence claims that the charges should be dropped. The pair were arrested in October for participating in protests which demanded the immediate formation of a power sharing government to ease the suffering of people Zimbabwe.

Dignity! Period

Access to sanitary products for women in Zimbabwe is worse than ever, for many women sanitary protection is a luxury they can no longer afford. Women have been forced to use newspaper, rags or leaves as a substitute for sanitary pads which can cause serious infections.

ACTSA’s Dignity! Period campaign provides sanitary towels to women in Zimbabwe, just £3 a month provides sanitary towels for 3 women for a year.

[Visit the Dignity! Period pages of the ACTSA website to make a donation or learn more.](#)

Religious groups

The South African Council of Churches has called for Mugabe to step down. In a statement on 20 January the group said “We believe that Robert Mugabe is holding to illegitimate power. The people of Zimbabwe spoke on March 31, 2008 by electing a new leadership”.

Media

The Government has introduced new fees for journalists. Foreign media must now pay US \$30,000 a year to work in Zimbabwe plus US\$ 1,500 for each journalist. Zimbabweans working for international media companies must pay. US\$ 4,000 for a one year licence.

Education

Schools in Zimbabwe remain closed three weeks after term should have started. The government has said this is because exam papers have not been marked, but teachers will not return to work until they are paid a salary of \$2,200 a month in foreign currency and many have fled abroad. Last year children in Zimbabwe had 27 days of schooling.