

Zimbabwe update

This month, while the Government of National Unity still has a long way to go towards ensuring recovery from the economic crisis and respect for human rights, President Robert Mugabe and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai attended Zimbabwe's Independence Day celebrations together for the first time.

This issue looks at the prospects for international aid to carry out the economic recovery plans and the continuing human rights abuses in Zimbabwe's prisons. We also highlight civil society's response to the proposed new constitution process and the government's plans to relax media restrictions.

For more on these stories and the current situation in Zimbabwe visit the [ACTSA website](#).

SADC summit offers support but few funding commitments

Leaders of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) met at a summit held in Swaziland on 30th March to review their support for the economic recovery plan drafted by Zimbabwe's government of national unity. Leaders agreed to support plans to raise the \$8.3 billion needed to carry out the Short-Term Economic Recovery Programmes (STERP) and a two week deadline was agreed for countries to make specific pledges. The deadline passed however, with no specific commitments other than the US\$90 million promised by South Africa. Botswana has since pledged to extend a loan of US\$70 million, but the Minister of Finance Baledzi Gaolathe has said that this will be sourced through local banks and not directly from government. Mozambique, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia and Angola are reportedly still involved in internal consultations, but admitted that mobilising cash could be difficult in the current economic downturn.

Western donors including the US and EU have been cautious in promising Zimbabwe economic aid until they are satisfied by reforms made. However, the [British government has recently pledged an extra £15 million](#) for Zimbabwe and the World Bank has suggested this month that it is willing to help the country recover from the devastating economic crisis, but reiterated that it is critical for the country's institutions to restore democracy and human rights.

Civil society opposes new constitution process

A 25-member parliamentary committee comprising of legislators from the MDC and ZANU-PF will lead the process of writing a new constitution, it was announced this month. The committee is expected to subject the new constitution to a referendum by July 2010, although it has not yet been agreed who will chair the committee. Civil society organisations in Zimbabwe are opposing the plans, saying that the process should be driven by an independent commission not politicians. The secretary-general of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), Wellington Chibebe condemned the process saying: "If the process is not adjusted so that it is people-driven, then we will be forced to come up with a position to say no to the whole process and outcome." The National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), an organization of labour movements, churches, business, human rights and civic groups, say they will begin campaigning for a no vote at the referendum in protest.

News in Brief

- Four major gold producers have announced plans to re-open in Zimbabwe after measures to stimulate the mining sector were announced by the Zimbabwe Reserve Bank last month. One of these, is negotiating a \$10m loan from Zimbabwean and foreign banks to re-open two of its five mines next month.
- Themba Maseko, a spokesperson for the South African government, has said that monitoring teams are satisfied that aid to Zimbabwe has been delivered properly and reached the targeted beneficiaries.
- President Robert Mugabe and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, held three critical meetings to resolve issues of conflict threatening the success of the unity government. The meetings have so far been inconclusive and are set to continue.

Three abducted political prisoners released

Morgan Tsvangirai's personal assistant, Ghandi Mudzingwa and Chris Dlamini, the MDC's director of security have been released from custody. The men had previously been transferred to hospital where they were under heavy guard after intervention from human rights lawyers. Two days after their release however, armed prison guards moved into the hospital where the two were stationed and prison wardens were stationed next to their beds. The Herald, a newspaper loyal to ZANU-PF, reported that the state is planning to appeal against their bail. Shadreck Manyere, a freelance journalist was released at the same time. The three were some of the more than 30 activists who were abducted and disappeared for several weeks before they turned up at various police stations before Christmas. Seven other MDC members who were abducted are still missing.

Zimbabwe Reserve Bank admit to taking money from private accounts

Zimbabwe's central bank took hundreds of millions in foreign currency from private bank accounts, it has been revealed. In a statement on Monday, Dr Gideon Gono, governor of the reserve bank in Harare released a statement admitting that the bank took money from private accounts without permission. According to Dr. Gono the government needed the money in order to fund loans for state-owned companies and buy grain and energy supplies, he said: "the unorthodox measures helped keep the country afloat." Gono promised that the money will be repaid but did not give a deadline for repayments. Most of the plundered accounts belong to private companies and NGOs.

State of Zimbabwe's prisons revealed in South African documentary

The South African broadcaster SABC exposed the horrific conditions of Zimbabwe's prisons in an undercover documentary at the beginning of the month. The investigative film was shot over three months using cameras smuggled into four of Zimbabwe's prisons. It documented the "living hell" of the prisons where thousands of inmates are deprived of food, sanitation and medical care and many prisoners suffer diseases related to severe malnutrition and poor sanitation. Prison populations also have high rates of HIV/AIDS and antiretroviral medication is unavailable. There are now fears that the appalling conditions shown in the documentary will worsen as the World Health Organisation has warned of a fast-spreading cholera outbreak in another Zimbabwe prison that could spread across the country's prisons. [Three prison warders were arrested](#) over the filming of the documentary and charged with contravening sections of the Official Secrets Act but subsequently acquitted. Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa, after a retreat in Victoria Falls, was quoted as saying one of the government's most immediate priorities was to improve the "justice delivery system," especially in prisons.

Dignity! Period

Access to sanitary products for women in Zimbabwe is worse than ever. Women have been forced to use newspaper, rags or leaves as a substitute for sanitary pads which can cause serious infections for which there is no available medication.

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](#)

ZCTU

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) has said it is giving employers up to the end of June to raise minimum wages for workers to US\$454 per month. ZCTU said their research shows an average Zimbabwean family of six people needs more than \$400 per month (four times the current wage) for basic goods and services.

Media

Zimbabwe's unity government plans to relax media restrictions as part of an action plan meant to restore basic rights, heal political scars and boost international trust. Ministers agreed on the 100-day action plan at a retreat in Victoria Falls at the beginning of the month.

.Human Rights

The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum issued a report showing human rights violations have increased since the beginning of the year. The group reported 435 incidents in February compared with 78 in January. It recommended that the government "should establish mechanisms to ensure reparation and justice...in order to bring about national healing."