

# Zimbabwe update

This month Zimbabwe has seen a new Government of National Unity sworn in, offering some hope of a long difficult road to recovery and an end to the economic crisis and the cholera epidemic. The month has also seen President Mugabe hosting a lavish banquet to celebrate his 85<sup>th</sup> birthday whilst the World Health Programme announced that three quarters of the Zimbabwean population were now dependent on UN food aid.

This issue looks at the calls from Zimbabwean leaders to the international community to give aid to the new unity government in its efforts to rebuild the country as well as the appeal for civil servants to return to work. We also note the continuing unlawful arrests and detention of political activists and the launch of an Archbishops' Appeal to deliver aid to Zimbabwe.

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

## Government of National Unity sworn in

Morgan Tsvangirai was sworn in as Prime Minister of the new unity government on 11th February, raising hopes that the desperate economic and health conditions could now be eased. These hopes were challenged when President Mugabe announced 23 names for the ZANU-PF incoming ministers, 8 more than their quota under the Interparty Political Agreement. The majority of those named were ministers in the last government which Mugabe had previously described as 'the worst in history'. South African President Kgalema Montlanthe was called in to mediate the disagreements which caused a 5 hour delay to the swearing-in ceremony. In the end [36 ministers](#) were sworn in to the unity cabinet on 13th February, meeting the deadline set by the South African Development Community (SADC) Summit of 26th-27th January for the finalisation of setting up an inclusive government. 5 former ministers from the ZANU-PF list arrived at the ceremony expecting to join the cabinet but were not sworn in.

Despite the demand from Morgan Tsvangirai for political prisoners to be released before he would take office, more than 30 human rights and MDC activists remain in jail.

## Zimbabwe requests aid to support unity government

Morgan Tsvangirai has asked South African President Kgalema Montlanthe to help Zimbabwe secure an aid package of more than US £5 billion. South Africa has not yet announced the details of how much they will give, but Montlanthe said South Africa was prepared to take the lead in any financial rescue package. It is believed that the money would be used initially to pay the salaries of critical professionals such as doctors, nurses and teachers and to begin rebuilding the health care and education systems. Britain has also announced readiness to increase its aid to Zimbabwe but only if the new power-sharing government takes steps towards economic and human rights reform. Key measures include the immediate release of political prisoners, moves towards greater freedom of press and opening talks with the IMF about an economic recovery plan.

## News in Brief

- Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai [made a statement](#) on the progress of the transitional government and presidential appointments made without consultation.
- [COSATU released a statement](#) condemning the continuing detention of MDC activists
- The EU announced that it welcomes the new unity cabinet but targeted measures will remain, stating that the government "will be judged by its actions"
- The Zimbabwean government announced that sterling, Euro, the US dollar, South African rand and Botswanan pula are now legal tender

## Unions announce end to teachers strike

On Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> February teachers agreed to end their year-long strike after the new Education Minister, David Coltart promised to review salary demands while seeking international aid. Coltart has asked donors for \$438-million for the education system over the next 6 months. Unions announced that teachers had agreed to go back to work on Monday, but demanded that salaries be reviewed to match what teachers are being paid in other countries in the region. Takavafira Zhou, president of the Progressive Teachers' Union in Zimbabwe (PTUZ) said that the deal also ensured that teachers who did not report for work, for economic and political reasons, would not be punished.

## Anglican Archbishops call for Mugabe to stand down

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York, Dr. Rowan Williams and Dr. John Sentamu, issued an unprecedentedly strong condemnation of President Robert Mugabe, stating that Zimbabwe's problems will never be resolved while he stays in power. Their article condemned the destruction of hope inflicted by Mugabe and recalled "when people involved in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa would say wistfully: "Look at Zimbabwe."" Dr. Williams used this article to announce an Archbishops' Appeal for aid, saying "Lives can still be saved and, more importantly, hope can be sustained."

## ZCTU calls on civil servants to return to work

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions has called on all civil servants to return to work in support of the unity government. The ZCTU told a press briefing that they support the unity government but only on a transitional basis. After meeting Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai to discuss issues of labour, ZCTU President, Lovemore Matombo said "...we are urging them to go to work in a spirit of co-existence."

## WOZA Valentine's Day demonstrators detained without warrant

7 Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) women and 3 men were arrested after police stopped a peaceful demonstration on Valentines day. They were taken to Bulawayo Central Police Station where they were denied access to their lawyer until 2 days later in clear violation of Zimbabwean law. WOZA reports that they were kept in horrific conditions and the women subjected to daily invasive strip searches. Under intense pressure, 6 of the group agreed to pay fines for obstructing traffic and were released. The remaining 4 women were taken to court 2 days later where they were unconditionally released after the prosecutor refused to entertain charges. WOZA is considering suing the Zimbabwe Republic Police for wrongful arrest.

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## ACTSA Event- ZIMBABWE: Will unity Prevail? with Lucia Matibenga MP

Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> March, 6.45-8pm

Grimond Room, Portcullis House, Westminster, London, SW1A 2LW.

Space is limited: RSVP [campaigns@actsa.org](mailto:campaigns@actsa.org)



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## Cholera Epidemic

The number of infections exceeded the WHO's worst case estimates of 60,000 at the beginning of the month. The WHO now expects up to 55,000 more cases as the disease moves into the rural areas. WHO officials say that the epidemic will not end until May when the rains cease.

### Media

The Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ) has condemned the new system of fees introduced for journalists in January as a censorship ploy. ZUJ President Matthew Takaona told journalists: "We know that its strategy, after closing down most local newspapers, radio and television stations... is to make it difficult for any critical foreign media to operate from Zimbabwe."

### Human Rights

The Zimbabwean Human Rights NGO Forum released a report on the use of torture in Zimbabwe. The report pointed to a strong correlation between elections and torture and called upon the SADC to insist on clear benchmarks for the restoration of democracy, the rule of law and human rights in Zimbabwe, including an end to torture.