

Zimbabwe update

This month's update focuses on the Zimbabwe government's efforts to rebuild the economy, including the trade agreement set to be signed with South Africa's private sector and the support secured from the Non Aligned Movement leaders.

This issue also looks at the UN's warning of a possible cholera re-emergence, the launch of an alternative constitution-making process and the publication of a critical report by Human Rights Watch. We also highlight the controversial urban clean-up campaign in Harare and the need for a food assistance programme in the country.

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

Fresh capital from South Africa in a business-friendly climate

Zimbabwean and South African representatives are due to meet soon in order to sign the Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (BIPPA) through which Zimbabwe will secure 2.75 billion rand (339.5 million USD) worth of credit lines from South Africa's private sector. Several companies from South Africa's agriculture, mining, pharmaceutical and finance sectors have already declared to be willing to enter the Zimbabwe market. Over the last few months, the coalition government in Harare has put forward several measures to improve the investment climate in the country, including the removal of sector restrictions on foreign ownership, the commitment to protect private capitals and the adoption of a privatisation plan for state-owned enterprises. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) has strongly criticized this process of privatisation, arguing that it is the result of a top-down approach and will have severe social consequences on workers and consumers in general. "Cabinet has put the goal of profit maximisation ahead of human needs, rights and interests." ZCTU said in a statement last month.

Non Aligned Movement backs Zimbabwe's government

The Non Aligned Movement (NAM) has expressed hope that the inclusive government in Zimbabwe will successfully rebuild the economy and urged Western countries to lift the economic sanctions, describing them as "unilateral and arbitrary". During the 15th NAM summit held in Egypt, the movement's leaders praised the Global Political Agreement signed by Zimbabwe's three major parties and the formation of the coalition government. Member countries' leaders also hailed the successful mediation role played by the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and the region's effort to assist Zimbabwe in dealing with the challenges it faces. The summit's final document stressed the importance of increasing South-South co-operation in agriculture, education, health and environment preservation.

Cholera could re-emerge, UN warns

The United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has called for greater vigilance in addressing the source of the cholera outbreak that has killed over 4,200 people in Zimbabwe. Although the number of new cholera cases is reportedly on a downward trend in most provinces, new cases are still being reported in Harare, Manicaland and Masvingo provinces. "The problem of the lack of safe water and sanitation facilities, the main cause of the epidemic, has yet to be tackled in most parts of the southern African nation," OCHA said.

News in Brief

- Finance Minister Tendai Biti has secured a £600 million credit line from China. The loan is several times more than the total pledged to Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai by Western leaders during his recent international tour.
- The European Union has decided to engage in formal talks with the Zimbabwe government, seven years after sanctions were imposed against President Robert Mugabe and his inner circle for human rights violations
- In an Interview with SW Radio Africa Andrew Pocock, the outgoing UK Ambassador to Zimbabwe, said the accusation that Britain reneged on the Lancaster House agreement to fund land reform in Zimbabwe is just a "convenient myths" that has dogged the British/Zimbabwean relationship.

Civil society calls for an alternative constitutional reform

Zimbabwe civil society groups decided to launch a parallel process to produce a draft constitution. The National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) said the alternative convention will be held on Monday 27 July with the support of the ZCTU and the Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU). "Our agenda is to get a genuine process that will give our country a democratic constitution," Lovemore Madhuku, NCA chairman, said. The ZCTU and ZINASU have opposed the Kariba Draft promoted by Mugabe's supporters, which would leave the President's powers intact, and criticised Tsvangirai's party for taking part in a politician-led process without significant civil society involvement.

Human Rights Watch accuses Zimbabwe army

A new report published by Human Rights Watch attacks Zimbabwe's army for using forced labour, including children, to mine diamonds in the east of the country. "Zimbabwe's new government should get the army out of the fields [and] put a stop to the abuse," said Georgette Gagnon, the director of Human Rights Watch Africa. According to Human Rights Watch, there is clear evidence that the control of the mines is part of Mugabe's attempt to buy support from the military. In addition, Eldred Masunungure, a political scientist from the University of Zimbabwe, argued that influential elites will not allow the military to leave the diamond fields due to strong economic interests.

Urban clean-up campaign evokes fears in Harare

The Harare city council is planning an urban clean-up campaign for health and safety reasons. The campaign is spreading fear among city dwellers who still remember Mugabe's 2005 Operation Murambatsvina, which prompted the demolition of "illegal" structures, leaving hundreds of thousands of people homeless. According to Harare mayor Muchadeyi Masunda, the urban clean-up is needed in the wake of the cholera epidemic. "Illegal settlements would certainly encourage the spread of waterborne diseases," Masunda said.

Food aid to increase soon

A new report released by USAID suggests that large-scale food assistance to Zimbabweans could start in the next few weeks. The report shows that Zimbabwe's April 2009 harvest was better than in previous seasons, yet still 680,000 tons short of the national requirement. According to another report presented by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP), about 2.8 million people will need food assistance in 2009/10. "Although food security in Zimbabwe has improved in 2009, relief agencies predict the need for a large-scale food assistance programme starting in August or September, when food stores from the April 2009 harvest will likely be exhausted." WFP spokesman Richard Lee said.

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 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 ACTSA's Dignity! Period web pages to make a donation or learn more.](#)

ACTSA
Action for
Southern Africa

231 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London, SW1V 1EH
Telephone: 202 3263 2001 Email: campaigns@actsa.org

Trade Unions

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) put its weight behind ZCTU's boycott of the Parliament-driven constitutional reform process. "We remain fully supportive of the call by the ZCTU ... for a people-driven constitution-making process" said Bongani Masuku, of COSATU.

Media

"In contravention of both the letter and spirit of the Global Political Agreement, the state media continue to serve partisan interests," Tsvangirai told journalists at the Gweru Press Club, adding that "sooner rather than later market forces in the form of alternative media will enable the people of Zimbabwe to choose their sources of news on a daily basis."

Rights

The International Peace Information Service published a new paper, entitled "Arms and Corruption: Fuelling Human Rights Abuses", which focuses on the involvement of Western arms manufacturers with Zimbabwe's state-run arms industry despite international sanctions. The publication stresses the urgent need for a legally-binding global Arms Trade Treaty, fully consistent with respect for international human rights law.