

Zimbabwe update

Welcome to the March Zimbabwe update. As the world celebrated international women's day this month Zimbabwe has seen the tragic loss of the 'mother of the nation' Susan Tsvangirai and the slowing of the cholera epidemic.

This issue looks at the release of activists including Jestina Mukoko and statements on the life of Zimbabwean women from the group Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA). We also look at the launch of the new Revised Budget and Short Term Emergency Recovery Programmes and the IMF's announcement that it will not yet be giving aid to Zimbabwe.

For more news and information on Zimbabwe visit the [ACTSA website](#).

Susan Tsvangirai killed in car crash

Susan Tsvangirai, the wife of Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, was killed in a car crash on Friday 6th March. The Prime Minister was also involved in the incident and sustained minor injuries. The accident happened about 30 miles south of Harare as the Tsvangirais were returning to their home district, Buhera, for a rally. MDC officials said that their car was hit by the trailer of a British-US aid lorry as it swung out in front of it. His wife, Susan, was on the side hit by the trailer and suffered terrible injuries. The following week thousands of people converged on the rural home of the Tsvangirais for the burial. Morgan Tsvangirai told supporters that the crash was an accident and that there was no evidence of foul-play.

Susan was born in Buhera 50 years ago and met Tsvangirai in 1978 when he was a foreman at the Bindura nickel mine. Susan stood by Tsvangirai throughout his treason trial, 4 assassination attempts and a police beating in 2007. The couples 6 children were all present in the village of Manikwa in Buhera. Thousands made the journey to pay their respects with many walking miles to the area and diplomats from several countries, including Botswana, Swaziland, Kenya and South Africa were also present at the burial. Prime Minister Tsvangirai's official website states that he will return to official duties on the 1st April after a period of recuperation in South Africa

Peace activists released on bail

The Director of the Zimbabwe Peace Project and human rights activist, Jestina Mukoko, was granted bail 3 months after her kidnapping on December 3rd. She was charged with conspiring to violently overthrow the Government. The police denied responsibility for the abduction and have blamed the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO). Mukoko and 15 other activists were released and have signed affidavits detailing the prolonged torture to which they were subject while in CIO custody, which included beatings on the soles of their feet, simulated drowning, electric shocks and solitary confinement. Jestina Mukoko and eight of her co-accused have since been remanded on bail to April 9. Despite these releases, many activists remain in police hands. The MDC recently published the names of the activists who they know are still missing. President Robert Mugabe told the visiting Norwegian Minister, Erik Solheim, that there are no political prisoners in the country and all those arrested have criminal charges to answer to.

News in Brief

- MDC deputy agriculture minister designate, Roy Bennett was released on bail on the 12th March. Bennett has been sworn in as senator but it has been reported that President Mugabe is refusing to swear him in as a deputy minister.
- Data released this month from the Central Statistical Office (CSO) showed an inflation rate of -3.1% for the last 2 months. The last time official figures showed a month on month fall in inflation was in mid-2005.
- The WHO said early in the month that the cholera outbreak was showing signs of slowing. This was followed by a drop in reported cases of 63% in a week at the end of the month according to WHO figures.

The IMF will not give aid to Zimbabwe until debts are cleared

The International Monetary Fund have said that they will not provide aid to Zimbabwe until the new unity government has proved its commitment to sound policies and settled outstanding debts. The announcement was made after a 2 week visit to Harare. The IMF said it was ready to assist Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's new government but assistance would depend on "a track record of sound policy implementation, donor support and a resolution of overdue financial obligations to official creditors". Zimbabwe has arrears of \$89m to the IMF, \$600m to the World Bank and \$460m to the African Development Bank. The IMF was visiting Zimbabwe in March and a report and decision about IMF assistance is expected by the end of April.

Revised Budget nearly halves government spending plans

The new minister of finance, Tendai Biti, has introduced a revised budget reducing the revenue target for 2009 to US \$1 billion, a reduction of 43%. This reduction was made in order to align with the revised revenue projections. Biti pointed out that in the last 8 years GDP has fallen by more than 40%, stating "The reality of our economic situation is that it is grim." The new budget statement is designed to work in conjunction with Short Term Emergency Recovery Programmes (STERP) launched the following day. STERP has the mandate of rebuilding the service base and the productive economy and will depend on substantial international financial assistance if it is to succeed.

WOZA say women not fairly represented in Unity Government

Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) released a statement marking international women's day on 8th March. They spoke about "the need for gender equality, respect for women's rights and an end to violence." The statement drew attention to the current situation of ordinary Zimbabwean women which they described as "heartbreaking". Life expectancy for women in Zimbabwe is currently 34; anti-retroviral medication and sufficient nutrition are inaccessible to many. WOZA accused the unity government of falling short of including women, stating that despite the rhetoric of the Global Political Agreement "women are still not fairly represented in most spheres in Zimbabwe". WOZA went on to mourn the death of Susan Tsvangirai saying, her death was "a shocking blow to the nation and all Zimbabwean women."

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.](#)

SADC to discuss Zimbabwe aid

Heads of state from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) will meet on March 30th to discuss a regional economic deal to help speed Zimbabwe's recovery from its economic and humanitarian crisis. The Zimbabwe Unity Government is hoping to secure an aid package of \$2 billion.

Media

Plans have been announced to launch two new privately owned daily newspapers. The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (MMPZ) welcomed the plans which they said would end the six-year government monopoly of the dailies market in place since the authorities banned *The Daily News* in 2003.

Education

Zimbabwe's teachers have threatened to renew strikes next month unless the government agrees to pay them more than the US\$100 allowance they received this month. Officials from the Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) and the Zimbabwe Teachers Association (ZIMTA) said that their members would not report for duty for the second term in May unless their salaries were increased.