

# Zimbabwe update

This month's update focuses on the peaceful demonstration of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) disrupted by the Zimbabwean police, which led to local, regional and international condemnation.

This issue also looks at the first visit of an EU delegation to Zimbabwe in seven years, ZINASU's protest against high tuition fees, the decision taken by teachers to call off their three-week strike and the new fund for education in Zimbabwe launched by UNICEF. We also highlight the demonstration held by WOZA to mark the International Day of Peace and the continuous concerns over the impartiality of the State-owned media.

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

## ZCTU demonstration disrupted

A peaceful demonstration organised by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) earlier this month in Harare was disrupted by the police. The ZCTU had planned the demonstration to commemorate the protests held on 13 September 2006, during which the police arrested and brutalised more than 15 leaders and members of the federation. However, Zimbabwean authorities barred the ZCTU from holding a march and prevented the event from taking place by deploying water cannons and heavily armed police officers ahead of the planned demonstration. According to Titus Chagwedera, the officer commanding Harare South District, the event was not approved because the commemoration would have opened "already healed wounds." ZCTU acting secretary-general Japhet Moyo strongly criticised the police, saying that they made "a very unfortunate decision." The MDC, Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's party, condemned the police actions, stating: "[The MDC] deplored strongly the actions of the armed police who used unnecessary and illegal force to disrupt the ZCTU gathering [...] The MDC treasures and values the rights of the workers and the people in general."

## EU returns to Zimbabwe after seven years

Seven years after their last official visit in the country, the European Union this month sent a delegation to Zimbabwe to "re-injecting dynamism into the relationship", according to one European official. The EU delegation was welcomed "with open arms and great expectations" by President Robert Mugabe, whose priority is the lifting of EU sanctions against him and his ZANU-PF party. However, the EU delegation, led by Gunilla Carlsson, Sweden's International Development Minister, and Karel De Gucht, European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, did not focus on the sanctions issue and raised concerns about the fragility of the coalition government and the continuing human rights and property rights violations in the country. Making clear that the process of re-engagement will be long, EU officials announced a 90 million Euros fund for the education sector and said that development aid will increase further if the political climate improves.

## Zimbabwe education funded by UNICEF

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has launched a 70 million US dollar fund to assist the Zimbabwean education sector. The fund will be used primarily by the Education Ministry to buy school textbooks and "the objective for the first year is to reach every child in Zimbabwe with a textbook within 12 months," as claimed by Peter Salama, UNICEF's country representative.

## News in Brief

- Due to differences regarding the controversial constitution-making process, the ZCTU has decided to pull out of the National Association of Non Governmental Organisations (NANGO) and Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition. The ZCTU continues to oppose the current ongoing constitution making process, arguing that it is not people-driven but entirely led by political parties.
- According to sources inside the MDC, Prime Minister Tsvangirai suggested launching a campaign of meetings and rallies to consult party members and supporters on the future of the coalition government. Tsvangirai allegedly called for a bottom-driven process to decide whether or not the MDC should pull out of the national unity government.

## **ZINASU protests against high tuition fees**

The Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU) has organised a series of activities to protest against the exorbitant tuition fees at State colleges. Earlier this month, the students' union staged a protest march, attended by more than 200 Zimbabwean university students, which handed a petition to the Minister for Higher Education and begun boycotting classes to put pressure on education authorities. Tuition fees in universities, ranging from \$400 to \$700, are beyond the reach of the majority of students and ZINASU has decided to take action to prevent students from "being forced to drop studies." Clever Bere, President of ZINASU, said "As ZINASU, we are saying a big no to the privatisation of education, we are saying we can't have our colleagues being forced to drop studies because of a lack of fees."

## **Teachers call off strike to avoid politicisation**

The Zimbabwe Teachers Association (ZIMTA) has called off its three-week strike over salaries and many teachers returned to classrooms on Monday 21 September. Tendai Chikowore, president of ZIMTA, said "we feel we should give the discussion a chance," claiming the union's decision was due to the progress of negotiations with the government. Another reason behind the decision to end the strike was the attempt made by Mugabe's party ZANU-PF to "hijack" the job boycott. "The strike has been politicised and some people are trying to gain mileage by interfering with the strike," Chikowore said. In particular, ZANU-PF militias were reported to threaten teachers who had ignored the call for a strike by the teachers' union.

## **Mining to boost investments in the country**

Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai has recently said that his government is aiming to attract as much as 16 billion US dollars in investment by 2018 as a result of a new mining royalties and taxes plan. In particular, the Zimbabwean government is going to review the mines and minerals acts by the end of the year to take advantage of the country's vast mineral reserves, including platinum, chrome and nickel. "Zimbabwe's mining sector presents the most immediate opportunity to attract significant investment," said Tsvangirai.

## **WOZA marks the International Day of Peace**

The Zimbabwean campaigning organisation Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) held a demonstration in Harare to mark the United Nations 'International Day of Peace' on September 21. The protest march was attended by over 1,000 WOZA members under the slogan "Social Justice will bring Peace of Mind." According to WOZA, "Zimbabweans still do not have peace of mind a year after the power-sharing deal was signed." The protesters also handed a petition to the UNDP offices in Harare, calling for the UN to support the health and educational sectors in Zimbabwe.

## **ZINASU URGENT ACTION**

Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU) President, Clever Bere, and the other student activists were arrested on August 5, during a meeting organised to discuss the issue of tuition fees, and released on bail after spending two nights in jail. ZINASU thanked ACTSA and its supporters for all their efforts and asked them to keep it up.

Please write to the Minister of Justice, Patrick Chinamasa, condemning the violation of the students' rights to freedom of association, expression and assembly guaranteed under Zimbabwe's constitution and asking for all charges to be dropped.

Take action and write to the Zimbabwean Minister for Justice now!



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## **Aid**

Zimbabwe's Finance Minister Tendai Biti said the country needs 10 billion US dollars in foreign aid for reconstruction but argued that "it's going to be a long while before bilateral assistance comes to Zimbabwe ... so we will have to look at foreign direct investment."

## **Media**

The Zimbabwe branch of the Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA) has stressed the unacceptable upsurge of hate speech against opponents of President Mugabe in the national media controlled by the State. The chairman of MISA-Zimbabwe said that using hate language is very dangerous because it could incite soldiers and other groups to directly target any perceived opponent.

## **Students**

Student representatives of the Mutare Polytechnic were arrested by police and then released after paying a fine for writing an open letter to the Minister of Education. The letter criticised the collapse of the education sector and asked the government to address the concerns raised by the students. ZINASU spokesperson said "ZINASU remains firm and steadfast in the struggle to defend the students' rights and will not capitulate to any act of intimidation."