

Zimbabwe: An update November 2008



One Month in Zimbabwe

Power sharing talks between Zanu PF and the MDC have again reached stalemate after the conclusions of last months SADC extra-ordinary summit were rejected. The MDC have commented that they will not join a power-sharing government until outstanding issues, such as governors and the allocation of key ministries have been resolved. MDC spokesman Nelson Chamisa said "we cannot be invited to be passengers and be bystanders in a government we are supposed to be partners. No amount of propaganda against us would force to jump into this government." Representatives from the MDC and Zanu PF met for further talks on 25 November in South Africa to discuss the constitutional amendment needed to pave the way for a power sharing government.

The Government impeded a planned visit to Zimbabwe by members the Group of Elders, former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, former US President Jimmy Carter and human rights activist Graca Machel, who were refused visas to enter the country. The government described the visit in the Herald Newspaper as "a partisan mission by a group of people with partisan interests." The Group of Elders issued a joint statement from South Africa "Pleading for the leadership [of the ruling party and opposition] for the sake of the people to find a solution that would help them move forward." They also made several other recommendations and urged the international media to keep Zimbabwe on the agenda.

The humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe has deteriorated, a national state of emergency has been declared over the cholera epidemic which on 5 December had officially killed 565 people with over 12,000 infections. The Zimbabwe Government have appealed to the international community to help deal with the crisis, Health Minister David Parirenyatwa commented to international donors "Our central hospitals are literally not functioning," while Deputy Water Minister Walter Mzembe appealed for money to buy water treatment chemicals, saying that the ministry only had enough for 12 weeks.

Facts

- The European Commission has said it will provide 9 million Euros in aid to Zimbabwe to help deal with the outbreak of Cholera. While the UN health agency called for \$2 million from donors to provide medical assistance over the next 3 months.
- Doctors Without Borders said on 20 November that up to 1.4 million people in Zimbabwe were at risk from Cholera.

- The UN has placed school attendance in Zimbabwe at 20%, a drop from more than 90%, as teachers continue to be unable to teach.
- On 4 December new bank notes of Z\$ 10 million, Z\$50 million, and Z\$100 million were issued by Zimbabwe Central Reserve Bank.
- South Africa has withheld R300-million in agricultural aid to Zimbabwe, the South African cabinet said in a statement that "This money will be only disbursed once a representative government was in place"



Life for a Trade Unionist

Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) called for a mass action on 3 December to pressurise the Government to increase the amount of money that Zimbabweans are able to draw from the bank each day. ZCTU President Lovemore Matombo commented "Hundreds, if not thousands, of us have died not because of anything other than the imposed cash withdrawal limits," The current limit of Z\$50,000 a day is not enough to buy a quarter of a loaf of bread. Matombo described the action as the day when workers and the generality of the public will throng banks and demand unlimited withdrawal of their money." However, the ZCTU planned action was broken up by the police and around 70 arrests were made. The Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe Gideon Gono announced on 2 December that with effect from 4 December the withdrawal limits would be raised to Z\$100 million per week. The ZCTU's Secretary General, Wellington Chibebe commented that Gideon Gono "has been in the habit of pre-empting out strike action by continuously raising the limits." And that "It is now evident people's problems will not be solved by these meaningless adjustments."

Life for a Student

Zimbabwe National Students' Union (ZINASU) has called for the release of General Councillor, Archieford Mudzengi. Mudzengi was arrested on 1 December, while in the process of writing his exams, on the grounds that he had missed a court appearance date following his arrest during demonstrations in Bulawayo earlier in the month. ZINASU commented that "We condemn the continued violations of our academic freedoms by the Mugabe regime and the arrest clearly shows that we are dealing with an insensitive regime."

Life for a Woman

Women of Zimbabwe Arise have been awarded the 5th Annual Human Right's Prize by Amnesty International German Section to recognise the groups tireless struggle for human rights. The award was presented on 16 November to leaders of the group Jenni Williams and Magodonga Mahlangu. Williams and Mahlangu were granted a special exception from the bail conditions imposed following their arrest in October, in order to travel to Germany. Williams and Mahlangu were in court on 2 December where their strict bail conditions, which required them not to travel more than 40 kilometres from Bulawayo post office, and report to their nearest police station twice a week were dropped. They will be back in Court on 22 January.

Women's rights activists have demanded justice for politically motivated rapes which occurred during the 2008 election campaign. Zimbabwe Rape Survivors Association (ZRPS) has been recording testimony from raped women, lobbying for access to justice, and providing rehabilitation services for raped women. Founder Betty Makoni commented "The women are highly traumatised and, what makes matters worse, ostracised by local communities." She added "The pattern of the cases is that of

systematic political persecution. Testimonies from women reveal how army chiefs and Zanu PF militias deliberately embarked on a campaign against MDC supporters. We are talking of state-sanctioned violence here." She hopes to be able to bring the cases to the International Criminal Court as the judicial system in Zimbabwe does not have a good track record in prosecuting sexual violence. AIDS Free World co-director Paula Donovan explained "We know Zimbabwe is not a signatory to the International Criminal Court Convention, so there are many avenues of pursuing them, for example by getting a referral from the United Nations Security Council [to allow the ICC to investigate]." Netsai Mushonga, coordinator of the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe commented. "What is happening in our country is a total disregard of women. Our leaders [who have sanctioned violence against women] should be taken to task."

Life for Religious Groups

Bishop Sebastian Bakare's address to a human rights conference in Lulea, Sweden on 27 November was broadly critical of the political and humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe. He commented that "the voice of the Church in Zimbabwe has not been loud enough to condemn the evil system that our people experience daily" and called for a return to human dignity in Zimbabwe.

The leaders of the World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, World YWCA and the World Student Christian Federation meeting in Geneva on 18 November commented that they are "disappointed and saddened" by the ongoing political deadlock in Zimbabwe. They said "SADC leaders have let down the people of Zimbabwe who dutifully went to vote for a new government on March 29, 2008 and are today still waiting for a government of their choice." The group also called for increased transparency in SADC and the African Union.

Violent Oppression and insecurity

Violence

Members of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) marched in Harare on November 10 to demand a new government. Riot police used batons to break up the protests. Lovemore Madhuku, the NCA leader, who was arrested and detained by the police commented "The NCA emphatically condemns this unjustified obstruction of the organisation's peaceful protest actions."

On 18 November health workers staged a protest outside the Parirenyatwa Hospital to march calling for 'urgent action' to address the crisis in public health care in Zimbabwe. The striking health workers were beaten and dispersed by Zimbabwean riot police and then prevented from leaving the hospital. Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO forum commented the police actions are "flagrantly violating the health workers' constitutionally and internationally protected rights to assembly, association and expression." Demonstrations by health workers planned for 3 December were also broken up by police and arrests made.

There were clashes between riot police and soldiers on 1 December as soldiers apparently became frustrated that they were unable to withdraw their salaries from local banks. An IRIN correspondent reported that police had "intervened after about 100 soldiers begun another looting spree in the city." On November 27 and 28 soldiers were involved in looting sprees in Harare and Mutare. An anonymous army officer told IRIN "The junior soldiers are angry that very senior officers are stealing money meant to pay the salaries for the soldiers. The economic hardships felt by the soldiers have made many of them very desperate, to the point of robbing civilians." Minister of Defence Mr

Sydney Sekeramayi blamed the disturbance on "unruly elements from the defence forces."

Zimbabwean human rights activist and executive director of Zimbabwe Peace Project Jestina Mukoko was abducted from her home in Norton, 40km west of Harare on 3 December. Abel Chickomo of Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum commented "They assaulted her caretaker and took her away." Amnesty International stated that at around 5am local time, a group of at least 12 men stormed her home... and took her by force while still barefoot and dressed in pyjamas." The Zimbabwe Peace Project works to catalogue human rights abuses and more recently abuses of food aid by the government.

Insecurity

The World Food Programme has been forced to cut the rations it gives to Zimbabweans after receiving no response to an appeal for \$140 million in funding for the next year. The World Food Programme needs to feed an estimated 4 million people by the end of November. Spokeswoman Emila Casella said that "We don't have enough food" and that "What's particularly concerning is that there is currently no food in the pipeline for Zimbabwe in January and February." The lack of funding means that rations will be cut to 10 kilograms of cereals per month, down from 12 kilograms while pulses per person will be cut to 1 kilogram from 1.8 kilograms.

The World Health Organisation reported on 5 December that the outbreak of Cholera, which began in August, had reached 14,000 suspected cases and has resulted in 589 deaths with numbers continuing to rise. Cholera has been reported in all but 1 of Zimbabwe's 10 provinces and the real number of deaths could be much higher as many deaths are not officially recorded. On 4 December the Zimbabwe government officially declared the epidemic to be a national emergency and called for assistance from the international community. The outbreak comes as Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights (ZADHR) described the health system as "in a state of collapse." While Dr Amon Severegi Chairperson of the Hospital Doctor's Association commented; "There is little we can do because most hospital workers are on strike and hospitals are closed. There is no medicine and no equipment." While the World Health Organisation has commented that there is a "massive gap" in the availability of medicine and that "Cholera outbreaks in Zimbabwe have occurred annually since 1998, but previous epidemics never reached today's proportions." On 1 December Health Minister David Parirenyatwa told Zimbabweans to stop shaking hands to stop the spread of the disease he said "I want to stress the issue of shaking hands. Although it's part of our tradition to shake hands, it's high time people stopped shaking hands." Water supplies in much of Harare are now cut off as ZNWAT has run out of essential chemicals needed to treat the water and sewer system are in a state of disrepair.

Deaths from Anthrax have also been reported in Southern Zimbabwe. Anthrax is usually caught from eating meat from infected cattle. Cattle can quickly become infected and as Matthew Ncube a farmer who has lost 35 cattle already "My entire kraal was almost wiped out and the few cattle that I have remaining have been vaccinated [but] I am not sure whether the seven remaining cattle I have left will not die also." The problem then as Ephraim Moyo from Save the Children commented "that people in the village do not throw away cattle that die ... they eat the meat."

Life for the Media

Zimbabwean freelance cameraman Mike Saburi has won the 2008 Mohammed Amin award for supplying international news media with footage from Zimbabwe. Salin Amin, Chairman of Africa 24 Media, said "covering this difficult story has meant that many

journalists had to work under harrowing conditions and experience regular harassment from security forces not just for themselves but for their families including home searches, threats of physical violence and actual arrests. All for the sake of bringing the world images from across Zimbabwe and tell the story of their country," he added. "This year's winner consistently endured such conditions on a regular basis." The award recognises outstanding contributions to news and television media by those without a high profile and was established in honour of Mohamed Amin, an African cameraman killed in an airline hijacking in 1996.

Call to Action

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) took action on 3 December to demand the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe removes the cap on bank withdrawals. Gideon Gono the Governor of the Reserve Bank has increased the withdrawal limit to Z\$100 million a week, enough to buy two loaves of bread. Stand with ZCTU and their courageous action by sending an email Gideon Gono to call for the removal of the cap on cash withdrawals with immediate effect.

Email Gideon Gono from the ACTSA website.

<http://www.actsa.org/page-1415-Demand%20RBZ%20removes%20it%20cap%20on%20cash%20in%20Zimbabwe.html>

Calls from ACTSA

To become a member of ACTSA follow this link

<http://www.actsa.org/page-1026-Give%20regularly%20&%20become%20a%20member.html>

To donate to ACTSA see here

<http://www.actsa.org/page-1007-Donate.html>

Access to sanitary products in Zimbabwe is worse than ever. Support ACTSAs Dignity! Period. campaign and visit

<http://www.actsa.org/page-1022-Dignity!%20Period..html>