

Zimbabwe: An update July 2008



One Month in Zimbabwe

Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangari this month agreed to hold talks about a possible power sharing government. At the end of the month Tsvangari announced he was 'fairly satisfied' with the SADC mediated talks, aimed ending the country's crisis. The talks are due to resume on Sunday 3rd August in Johannesburg. Read ACTSAs [position on the talks](#).

Lovemore Motombo, President of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and General Secretary, Wellington Chibebe were due back in court on 30th July, charged with "spreading falsehoods prejudicial to the state". The case was once again postponed until the 27th August.

Britain and the United States' calls for tougher sanctions against Zimbabwe were blocked at the UN Security Council, whilst the European Union increased its targeted measures to cover an additional 37 supporters of the regime.

On 30th July bank governor Gideon Gono announced that 10 zeros would be lopped off the Zimbabwe dollar, with a Z\$1 note replacing the Z\$100Bn note introduced the previous week.

Facts:

- Zimbabwe's official inflation rate has escalated to 2.2m%, in response Zimbabwe introduced a bank-note worth Z\$100bn – this is just enough to cover the cost of a loaf of bread and amounts to just half of a teacher's monthly salary.
- On the 2nd July, the German banknote producer Giesecke & Devrient GmbH said it has "cease[d] delivering banknote paper to the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe with immediate effect".
- A report last month by the UN's (UN) Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP) estimated that the recent maize harvest was down 28% on last year, which itself fell 44% on 2006. The FAO/WFP report says that two million people will need assistance in the coming weeks as what remains of their food stocks runs out.
- According to the UN's FAO the last summer harvest yielded only 575 000 tons of maize, against demand of about 1.8 million tons. According to the UN, 29 percent of the population is "chronically malnourished."
- The UK Government on the 11th July announced that the threat of deportation has been lifted from more than 10,000 Zimbabwean asylum-seekers while Robert Mugabe remains in power.
- The South African department of home affairs spokesperson Siobhan McCarthy stated that the number of people arriving at the Crown Mines Refugee reception area in Johannesburg had leapt from 800 a day to more than 5 000 a day in the past month, the majority of these people are Zimbabwean.

Life for a Trade Unionist



Lovemore Matombo, President of Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and Wellington Chibebe, General Secretary of ZCTU, charged with spreading falsehoods prejudicial to the state in speeches they made on May 1st, briefly appeared before a Harare Magistrate on the 30th of July who set 27 August as the new trial date.

The ZCTU leaders are on Z\$20 billion bail that was granted by High Court on 19 May 2008. As part of the conditions for granting bail, the two are barred from addressing any political gathering, and have to reside at their given home addresses.

At the beginning of the month ZCTU condemned the June 27th Elections and called on the African Union to appoint a high-profile envoy to help mediate talks with the opposition. "The 27 June, 2008 elections were not free and fair and did not represent the will of the people of Zimbabwe," the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) said in a press release.

ZCTU has called for talks between President Robert Mugabe's ruling ZANU PF party and the opposition to be swift and short because of the state of the economy. "Inter party talks should take less than two months because the economy is in bad shape (and political) violence is continuing," the ZCTU said in a statement. The union asserted that a Government of National Unity is a subversion of the National Constitution and only a Neutral Transitional Authority should be put in place with a mandate to take Zimbabwe to free and fair elections that will hopefully not be disputed by the parties.

The ZCTU has written to Reserve Bank Governor Gideon Gono asking him to increase limits on cash withdrawals from bank accounts. The letter said the maximum cash withdrawal limit of Z\$100Bn was not enough for urban workers whose daily public transport costs alone amount to about Z\$150Bn. "It is in this light that we are advising your office to either remove the limit as you did with transactions or at least allow account holders to withdraw a minimum amount equivalent to two days transport fares, plus necessary daily expenses," reads part of the letter. The ZCTU calculated the figure enough for two days to be Z\$2.5 trillion and said even that amount has to be reviewed every three days.

Life for Civil Society:

Students

The Zimbabwe National Students' Union (ZINASU) issued a statement calling on Zimbabweans to confront Mugabe's 'illegitimate regime.' They said the, 'ingredients of an election during the run-up to June 27 were absent, what rather characterised the run-up were ingredients of a war.' On top of the violence the students say the run-off was held outside the legal 21 day period and as such the March 29 results should stand. ZINASU urged all elected councillors, members of parliament and senators to boycott all sittings that might legitimise Mugabe's regime. Read ZINASU's full position on the [June 27 events](#).

A University of Zimbabwe student appeared in the Harare High Court this month on charges of plotting a coup against the government of Robert Mugabe. Rangarirai Mazirofa, 21, an agriculture student, was arrested in May 2007 with six other men for allegedly plotting to assassinate the President with the help of the security forces. A medical report prepared on order of a court confirmed that following his arrest Mazirofa was severely tortured. The men all face a death sentence. The coup trial set for the 14th July was postponed due to prosecutors failing to provide defence lawyers with court papers in time to prepare for the case.

Women

The US ambassador to Zimbabwe on Wednesday 2 July called for the release of two women who braved beatings and arrest to hold a peaceful protest against Robert Mugabe six weeks ago. The two members of Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) were arrested in the capital, Harare, on May 28 and have been charged with disturbing the peace and publishing statements prejudicial to the state. US Ambassador James McGee said he hoped the two would be given bail and the "sham" charges dropped. "Jenni Williams is a prominent person whose voice should be heard," McGee said.

Jenni Williams and Magodonga Mahlangu were finally granted bail on the 3 July by Magistrate Mutongi in Harare Magistrate's Court.

The 14 members of WOZA who had been arrested on 28 May during a peaceful procession had their trial postponed until 26 August. Passports that had been confiscated as part of bail conditions were returned and all reporting conditions were removed. The trial was to have been held on 29 July but was postponed as the State was not ready. On 15 July, two members charged with distributing materials likely to cause a breach of the peace in Bulawayo Magistrate's Court were remanded to 16 September as, once again, the State was not ready to proceed to trial.

WOZA on the 30 July staged a demonstration at the Bulawayo offices of the state-owned Chronicle newspaper. The group called on politicians from the MDC and Zanu PF "to put the needs of the people first" during their negotiations in South Africa. A petition from WOZA was presented to newspaper staff, reportedly because of their biased coverage of the talks. A statement from WOZA said the group wanted to test the Memorandum of Understanding signed between Zanu PF and the MDC and see whether freedom of expression was now being respected in the country.

Religious Groups

Zimbabwean Catholic Archbishop Pius Ncube, who has been in England since June, said that he is planning to return to Zimbabwe soon. Speaking to parishioners on the 6 of July after celebrating Mass, he said that he has been in England in order to "pray, study and rest", but that: "a shepherd must be with his flock, even if it means death".

World Christian organisations have praised government and opposition leaders for signing the Memorandum of Understanding that paves the way for negotiations towards a lasting resolution of the difficult political crisis in Zimbabwe. The church groups also commended the mediation of the regional facilitator, President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and his team. The joint statement was issued by the World Council of Churches, World Student Christian Federation, World YWCA, World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Alliance of YMCAs. "We believe that the will of the people should be the fundamental basis on which to ground negotiations," the organisations said. "And we greet the beginning of this critical

round of negotiations with fervent hope for a new beginning for all Zimbabweans, restoration of peace, prosperity, dignity and the rule of law."

Increased Violent Oppression

The Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP) released a report on 25 July on the 'Run up to the 27 June 2008 Presidential Run off Election'. Analyzing politically motivated and food-related human rights violations in this period, the report notes an exponential increase in human rights violations with a 'shocking total of 16 400 recorded cases' from January to June 2008.

Patients in ward B3 of Gokwe General Hospital have been referred to as prisoners in a centre for abducted opposition supporters who, on the orders of the army and the Central Intelligence Organisation, are allegedly denied painkillers and treatment sustained at the hands of Zanu PF militia *The Guardian* reported on the 14th July. The opposition Movement for Democratic Change says that at least 13 of its members are held in the ward. Medical staff say they are mostly kept prisoner in side rooms. When doctors from the outside tried to bring the medicines they were turned away. So were ambulances to take them to private hospitals with drugs.

Life for the Media:

Shepherd Yuda, a prison officer, has produced a visual account for the Guardian of life in Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe. Yuda's film shows how he and his colleagues at Harare Central Prison had to fill in their postal ballots in front of prison bosses, how voters were told to pretend to be illiterate so an official would fill in their ballots for them, and how Zimbabweans were using felt tip pens to colour their fingers to pretend they had voted.

Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) spokesperson, Wayne Bvudzijena is allegedly editing all violence related stories by the Herald, Radio VOP has revealed. In an announcement to other news editors gathered in Masvingo, The Herald news editor, Isdore Guvamombe, said that the ZRP had demanded to see all stories on violence and that they had to be cleared by Bvudzijena before publishing. The news editor said this had been done for security reasons, adding he would continue sending copy to Bvudzijena every day and would only publish after the ZRP spokesman had cleared the violence reports.

Politics and the Election:

President Robert Mugabe and the opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai, on the 22 July signed a deal outlining a framework for talks on the country's political crisis.

The memorandum of understanding, brokered by President Mbeki of South Africa, commits all parties to "establishing the framework of an inclusive government". It also commits Mr Mugabe to ending political violence, ensuring the law is applied equally and guaranteeing the safe return home of tens of thousands of people. Mr Mugabe is also obliged to lift the ban preventing aid agencies from helping thousands. Substantive talks began on Thursday 24th July in Pretoria after the MDC demanded a neutral venue. The memorandum says it is "envisaged" that they will be completed in two weeks.

Zimbabwe warned the UN Security Council that the sanctions it is considering could push the African nation toward civil war. Zimbabwe's UN mission also said in a letter to the Council that the punitive measures proposed by the U.S. and Britain against Mugabe's government could turn Zimbabwe into another Somalia. The letter, which

was released to the media, said the sanctions would lead to the removal of Zimbabwe's "effective government and, most probably, start a civil war."

The European Union stepped up its targeted measures against Zimbabwe on the 23rd July, a day after Robert Mugabe signed a pact to enter power sharing talks with the opposition Movement for Democratic Change. The new embargo identified a further 37 supporters of the regime whose assets will be frozen and will be subject to a visa ban, preventing them from entering EU territory – this is in addition to the 130 already on the list. For the first time the measures will also affect four Zimbabwean companies and aim to close loopholes that have enabled Mr Mugabe to come to Europe despite being the first name on the travel ban.

The Zimbabwean government is struggling to find enough cash to pay its workers, including the military, after it was forced to cut back on printing money due to a lack of banknote paper from Europe. Zimbabwe is allegedly looking to Malaysia as an alternative source of paper but the government now fears the licence for the specialist software supplied by a European company Jura JSP will be withdrawn.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) stated towards the end of July that it is confident that the talks between ZANU (PF) and MDC will bear fruit. COSATU, called on the parties to commit themselves to the talks and work together with Southern African development Community and African union to find a lasting solution to the crisis in Zimbabwe.

Calls or Action: Support ZCTU

ZCTU activists Lovemore and Wellington were due to appear in court this Wednesday 30 July, to defend themselves against charges of speaking out about the state sponsored violence in Zimbabwe. The trial was once again postponed, this time until the 27th August. Please take a moment to add your voice to the growing tide of support for these brave trade unionists. [Click Here](#).

See ACTSA's current position on the [situation in Zimbabwe](#).