

Zimbabwe: An update September 2008



One Month in Zimbabwe

On 15 September Zimbabwe's political leaders finally reached a power-sharing settlement to end the long-running crisis in the country.

The deal comprises of Robert Mugabe as President and Morgan Tsvangirai as Prime Minister – with two deputy vice-presidents and two deputy prime ministers. Mugabe will keep his current two deputies, Joyce Mujuru and Joseph Msika, while Tsvangirai will appoint one of the two deputy prime ministers, with the other one coming from Arthur Mutambara's faction of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Mugabe will remain chairperson of the cabinet, while Tsvangirai becomes chairperson of a new council of ministers, from which Mugabe will be excluded.

This arrangement was proposed by Mbeki to break the deadlock about who will chair the cabinet. There will be 31 cabinet portfolios, with Mugabe's Zanu PF getting 15 and Tsvangirai's MDC 13, while the remaining three will go to Mutambara's faction.

A new constitution will be written through a public process, including other stakeholders, within 18 months. Amendments to the current one will nevertheless be carried out immediately, to give effect to the new arrangement; The power-sharing arrangement will be reviewed every year; Three non-constituency MPs will be appointed, with Mugabe, Tsvangirai and Mutambara appointing one each. The three will have no voting powers but will assist in the running of the government.

Zimbabwean civil society cautiously welcomed the agreement as a first step in helping to rescue Zimbabwe from economic collapse. Inflation has rocketed to over 11.2 million percent (officially) and millions have fled to neighbouring southern African countries.

At the end of this month detailed the MDC said talks with President Mugabe have failed to produce agreement on cabinet posts. MDC spokesman Nelson Chamisa said the MDC and Mr Mugabe remained far apart on the issue of who should control which ministries, creating a deadlock. MDC has a called for further mediation including African Union involvement.

Facts

- The European Union's executive body on 25 September boosted its humanitarian aid to Zimbabwe by 10 million euros (14.7 million dollars), largely for health care, water and sanitation.
- EU foreign ministers had been set to toughen the targeted measures on September 15, but the signing that day of a power-sharing deal between Mugabe and Tsvangirai led them to postpone the decision.



- Canada on 6 September joined the U.S. and European Union in imposing sanctions on Zimbabwe.
- Leading Zimbabwean economist John Robertson has noted that the 10 zeroes cut off the national currency last month could be back by mid-November if Harare does not reform economic policy. For example, transport from the Harare suburb of Kuwadzana to the city centre double in price in two days.
- The Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights reports a health crisis looms in urban areas owing to the severe shortage of running water. An outbreak of cholera in Chitungwiza claimed two more lives in one week, bringing the total to 13 deaths so far.

Life for a Trade Unionist

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) General Council met with Mr Morgan Tsvangirai on Saturday 27 September 2008 seeking an explanation on the contentious issues on the agreement between the MDC and Zanu PF. To read the issues with the agreement that the ZCTU raised please follow this link.

<http://www.actsa.org/Pictures/UplImages/pdfs/ZCTU%20Press%20Release%2029.09.08.pdf>

The ZCTU made it clear that their position regarding the power-sharing agreement as stated in the General Council communiqué of 12 July 2008 was unambiguous that it would not accept a flawed process. The General Council clearly resolved that: "A Government of National Unity is a subversion of our National Constitution and only a Transitional Authority should be put in place with a mandate to take Zimbabwe to fresh, free and fair elections that will hopefully not be disputed by the parties".

A Harare magistrate, Mr Bhila, on 18 September granted the ZCTU leaders' the right to have their constitutional case heard at the Supreme Court. This is after the two leaders, President Lovemore Matombo and Secretary-General Wellington Chibebe, who are facing allegations of 'communicating falsehoods prejudicial to the State' and 'inciting the public to rise against the government', said the law under which they are being charged, the Criminal Law Codification Act, infringed on their right to freedom of expression as enshrined in the Constitution of Zimbabwe. The trial will take place on 5 December 2008.

The ZCTU on 13 September said that its members would from now on demand salaries in foreign currency following The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) decision on 10 September that it would license shops to sell goods in foreign currency to help ease shortages of goods and local banknotes. ZCTU president Lovemore Matombo criticised the move, saying it reflected a failure of government policies.

The ZCTU has noted with concern that the government continues to ignore pleas by the labour movement that taxations of up to 47.5 percent is very retrogressive and wipes away the meagre earnings of workers, and that workers earning wages below the Poverty Datum Line (PDL), should not be taxed.

A strike over salaries by members of the Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ), which coincided with start of a new term on Tuesday 2 September, has forced almost a quarter of city schools in Harare to shut. Teachers are demanding salary increases that are commensurate with the hyper-inflationary environment. As a result of the unstable Zimbabwean dollar, the teachers are asking for a salary equivalent to US\$800. Many teachers, especially those working in the rural areas, failed to collect their July and August salaries because it would cost more to travel to the bank to get them.

Life for Civil Society

Students

The Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU) welcomed, albeit prudently, the signing of the inter-party deal by representatives of the three political parties in Parliament. The Union is cautious of the deal because of the lessons drawn from the history of relations with Zanu PF.

Universities and colleges in the country have not opened nearly 2 weeks after the start date of the new term sparking fears the government is broke and cannot afford to run the institutions. The President of ZINASU, Clever Bere said students are being denied the opportunity to finish their academic programmes on time. No official reason for the delay has been communicated to the students. Bere said all they saw on national television was the University of Zimbabwe Vice Chancellor Levy Nyagura appealing to the corporate sector to help fund the colleges. A 3 month strike by lecturers at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) is said to be the reason why the university has not opened. Authorities are said to be trying to tie up a deal with the lecturers before the university can be opened.

The ZINASU Secretary for international relations and nine other Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE) students were arrested on 18 September. The ten were arrested by officers from the Zimbabwe Republic Police following a demonstration on campus. Chiedza Gadzirayi and other students were protesting against the decision by the University to charge three hundred and eighty trillion dollars as fees for this semester. The arrest comes barely two days after the signing of a unity deal by the Movement for Democratic change and ZANU PF leadership. Among other things, the agreement provides for the revival of the education sector and the restoration of human rights and the rule of law.



The role of the student and youth movement during the country's political transition was the focus of a discussion in London hosted by Action for Southern Africa, the National Union of Students and Young Labour this month. Speakers included Clever Bere, ZINASU President and Brilliant Dube, ZINASU Vice-President. Bere commented on how the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions and Labour Unions in the UK had built solidarity, and in turn suggested that the UK National Union of Students and ZINASU could participate in exchanges and twinning.

Women

Jenni Williams of Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) and Abel Chikomo, Executive Director of the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum addressed a meeting in London on this month organised by the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum. The meeting was attended by many people from Zimbabwean-interested organisations. Jenni and Abel said they were reasonably optimistic about the power-sharing arrangement, with Jenni speaking of the need for national healing.

The trial of fourteen members of WOZA arrested near the Zambian Embassy in Harare on 28 May 2008, where they were to hand over a petition to the SADC chair calling for an end to post-election violence trial has been postponed. Magistrate Shomwe allowed the state's application for the trial to be postponed to 15 October 2008 on grounds that the prosecutor, Zvekare, who was familiar with the case, had fallen ill and could not be in court.

Religious groups

The Catholic Archbishop of Harare Robert Ndlovu spoke in Pretoria, South Africa, on Tuesday 9 September before the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference. He says once a political settlement is reached in Zimbabwe, it'll take a generation for the country to heal from years of violence. The Archbishop has called for national healing, reconciliation and rehabilitation in Zimbabwe. "After such a long time of suffering and this violence, people are wounded... And to move forward I think it would be quite imperative that we bring about some form of reconciliation and have this peace-building kind of exercise to try to bring people together, and to appreciate that things have gone bad but we need to move on. The church can help in that direction also," he says.

Violent Oppression and Insecurity

Violent oppression

Zimbabwe's national association of NGOs (NANGO) recently published a statement calling for transitional justice in Zimbabwe 'as a critical remedy to the massive human rights violations, ingraining fear, insecurity and mistrust in Zimbabwean society today.' IRIN has also published an article entitled 'Reconciling the past for a stable future' in which they cite a research paper 'Justice and Peace in a new Zimbabwe: Transitional Justice Options' by the South African think tank, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS). According to the authors, "the formation of a truth commission should be at the forefront of Zimbabwe's negotiations, considering the levels of alleged state brutality, the politicisation of the judiciary."

The ZCTU also issued a statement asking us to remember the brutal attacks on trade unionists on 13th September 2006. The ZCTU statement lists the injuries that activists sustained during their peaceful protest in Harare. These injuries include lacerations, bruises and fractures. The politicians negotiating the future of Zimbabwe

must not place the issue of transitional justice on the back burner if Zimbabwe is to find any kind of peace at all.

Brian Raftopoulos, scholar and activist says that the role of the international community in Zimbabwe today is delicate and difficult. On a recent visit to London, he told a meeting arranged by the Royal African Society and ACTSA that staying away could weaken the MDC. "It should be a phased engagement. There is a real danger that staying out will weaken the MDC. They need the ability to deliver reconstruction and must seize control of the reconstruction agenda," he said. Raftopoulos warned that the next round of opposition politics could be violent. It is essential that the MDC continues and strengthens its legacy of adherence to the rule of law.

Insecurity

Not all Zimbabwean aid agencies can get back to work despite a government announcement that a ban had been lifted, Fambai Ngirande a spokesperson for the National Association of NGOs has reported. "The state will only recognise the more welfare-oriented NGOs, which are registered as private voluntary organisations. Other NGOs will remain under suspension," Ngirande said.

The humanitarian situation on the ground is of crucial importance to the power sharing accord due to its severity. One report by the UN Integrated Regional Information Networks says 5 children died in Masvingo from malnutrition-related diseases during the week commencing the 15 September. Members of the Catholic run Bondolfi Mission confirmed that 2 of the children died in the Mapanzure area near the mission and 3 at a clinic in Mukaro Mission in the neighbouring Gutu district.

Life for the Media

The Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ), which represents journalists in the country, has launched a programme to provide life-prolonging antiretroviral (ARV) drugs to its HIV-positive members. Chakanyuka Bosha, the ZUJ's national co-ordinator, has reported that the union had identified medical experts to dispense the ARVs in accordance with government guidelines, and that the drugs would be available free of charge to union members and their immediate family. A foreign development agency, which did not wish to be named, has agreed to supply the drugs.

Call to Action

ZCTU leaders granted the right to have their Constitutional case heard at the Supreme Court.

This is after President Lovemore Matombo and Secretary-General Wellington Chibebe, who are facing charges of speaking out about the state sponsored violence in Zimbabwe, said the Criminal Law Codification Act infringed on their right to freedom of expression as enshrined in the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

Because of the constitutional challenge the trial date had to be moved to the **5th December** to give the Supreme Court the time to make a decision.

Please take a moment to add your voice to the support for these brave trade unionists at www.wearezctu.org

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

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