



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

### Fact Sheet

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor  
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## In Zimbabwe, No End To Suffering



Sewage flows through a Harare neighborhood.

human rights violations by Zimbabwean security forces and ruling party supporters in 2008 have more than tripled from 2007. Since the end of October, as many as 42 members of the opposition and civil society have been abducted by suspected government forces and remain missing. The Mugabe regime continues to brutally restrict basic freedoms through state-sponsored violence. Security forces refuse to allow peaceful demonstrations by democratic groups to proceed, often using batons and tear gas to violently disperse gatherings.

Due to the intransigence of the regime, the humanitarian crisis worsens daily. Zimbabweans struggle to survive in an economy that has been devastated by malfeasance, corruption and inaction. Facing the highest inflation in the world, many citizens have resorted to a barter system. Unemployment is the norm. The Mugabe regime continues to impede humanitarian access, despite warnings that over 5 million Zimbabweans may go hungry in the coming months and a cholera epidemic that has already afflicted tens of thousands.

In violation of both the September 15 power-sharing agreement between political parties and the will of the Zimbabwean people as expressed in the March 29 elections, Zimbabwe remains without a legitimate government, causing further suffering to its people. In addition to refusing to establish an equitable and inclusive government, the Mugabe regime continues to use violence against peaceful demonstrators and has failed to address the humanitarian crisis, further exacerbating the ongoing cholera epidemic and growing hunger and poverty. In response to a chorus of international leaders calling for him to step down, Mugabe recently told his party stalwarts that "Zimbabwe is mine."

In the face of condemnation by the international community, including United Nations

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon,

**UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:** "The humanitarian situation grows more alarming every day. Zimbabwe stands on the brink of economic, social, and political collapse. When the international community or a regional organization takes on a mission, it also takes on the responsibility to deliver. As I told the Security Council, we need a fair and sustainable political solution in Zimbabwe, as provided under previous agreements. And we need it fast."

### Attacks

- **193 opposition activists and supporters have been confirmed murdered since the March 29 election.**
- **Violence continues at significantly higher rates than seen before the March election.** Although violence was highest during the inter-election period from May-July, it is escalating
- **In Harare on December 16 and 17, two peaceful marches calling for a democratic resolution to the ongoing political crisis, each attended by over 500 members of civil society, were disrupted by police who resorted to tear gas, baton beatings, and arrests to disperse civilians.** The demonstrators had gathered in support of the NGO National Constitutional Assembly's "Three Point Plan" to bring transitional government, a new constitution, and free and fair elections to Zimbabwe.
- **Police violently dispersed peaceful labor demonstrations on December 3 in Harare.** Labor unions led demonstrations calling on the Reserve Bank to increase the daily cash withdrawal limit, which at the time was less than US\$1. Police responded by detaining over 70 protesters, including journalists and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions Secretary General.
- **NGOs report that in some rural areas, ZANU-PF "hit squads" and youth militia continue to act with impunity to intimidate and harass civilians.**



Police beat demonstrators in Harare.

### Illegal Arrest, Detention and Harassment

- **In a rash of abductions targeting the opposition and civil society, prominent human rights activist Jestina Mukoko was kidnapped on December 3 and remains missing.** Mukoko was taken from her home by armed men who were suspected to be members of government security forces. Two employees of Mukoko's NGO, the Zimbabwe Peace Project, were abducted from their office on December 8. Their whereabouts remain a mystery.
- **Zimbabwean journalist Shadrack Andrisson Manyere was abducted on December 13 and is still missing.** Although police went to Manyere's home and took his computer just hours after his abduction, the government denies holding him. In a government newspaper column published the same day, Mugabe spokesman George Charamba (pen name Nathaniel Manheru) threatened to expel journalists from the country.
- **The MDC reports that dozens of their activists remain in police custody on trumped up charges and are being held incommunicado.** For example, on October 29, MDC activists were abducted by security forces. Although it is believed they are being held for allegedly receiving training in sabotage, terrorism and banditry; their location remains unknown. Police also took one activist's two-year-old daughter into custody. On November 11, a High Court judge issued four orders, including to the Minister of Home Affairs and the Police Commissioner-General, demanding they produce the activists in court. The government has still not complied.

**Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan:** "What we have learned in the past few days is shocking. It is not just the extent of Zimbabwe's humanitarian crisis, but the speed of deterioration in the past few weeks that is most worrying. The scale, depth, and urgency of the situation are underreported."

- **On November 18 riot police violently disrupted a peaceful attempt by an estimated 1,000 medical workers to protest the country's ruined healthcare system.** As part of a general strike launched in October, the protesters planned to present a petition to the government calling for urgent action to address the crisis.

### Humanitarian Emergency

- **The number of hungry Zimbabweans is expected to rise to over 5 million in early 2009.** Millions of Zimbabweans have already run out of food or are surviving on just one meal a day. International aid agencies are being forced to reduce daily rations in order to stretch their remaining supplies. There are widespread reports of citizens in rural areas scavenging for wild fruits and roots. A poor summer harvest, hyperinflation, the lack of foreign exchange to import food, and the previous ban on NGO activities have led to an acute food crisis. The winter harvest is forecast to be less than one tenth of the local consumption requirement.
- **The Mugabe regime refused to allow former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and international human rights advocate Dr. Graça Machel, known as The Elders, entrance to Zimbabwe to assess the humanitarian crisis.** The Elders met instead with Zimbabwean and international political leaders, businessmen, aid workers, donors, UN agencies and civil society representatives in South Africa. Following the meetings, Dr. Machel noted that the Mugabe regime "can no longer feed, educate, or care for its citizens. It is failing its people."
- **While health care in Zimbabwe was once amongst the best in Africa, it has declined dramatically,** a trend which has accelerated in recent months. Public health facilities throughout the country have either closed or are barely functioning, with skeletal staff providing bare minimum health services. Hospitals lack water, electricity, soap, and even basic medical supplies, forcing many hospitals to refuse patients treatment. Untold numbers of Zimbabweans have died as a result. The closure of hospitals in Harare has forced many city dwellers to travel long distances, at great expense, to rural Mission hospitals for treatment. Even private hospitals now have limited resources, as medications and supplies, where available, must be purchased with scarce foreign currency.
- **Outbreaks of cholera are ravaging communities across Zimbabwe and spreading to neighboring countries.** As of December 17, over three-quarters of the Zimbabwe's districts were affected by cholera, and cases have been reported in Botswana, South Africa, and Zambia. The epidemic has resulted in 20,581 suspected cases and 1,123 deaths since August, according to the United Nations. The World Health Organization continues to plan on a worst-case scenario of 60,000 cases, which is based on the presumption that half of Zimbabwe's population is at risk of contracting cholera. To date, more than 5% of those afflicted have died; a 1% fatality rate is considered a crisis by health experts.
- **The quality of Zimbabwe's once thriving education sector continues to erode,** resulting in a loss of teachers, suspension of national exams, inflationary increases in school fees, and the postponement of the university semester. In November, teachers' unions called for the cancellation of the entire academic year.
- **The number of Zimbabweans seeking asylum in South Africa in the first quarter of 2008 alone exceeded 2007's total figure,** according to experts. An estimated three million Zimbabweans have left for South Africa and neighboring countries over the past decade seeking both economic opportunity as well as political asylum.



Raw sewage flows through Harare's Chitungwiza neighborhood.



Children are among the hardest hit by the cholera crisis.

### Economic Meltdown

- **Inflation continues its unprecedented rise.** Official regime figures placed the July inflation rate at 231,000,000%. Independent economists estimate inflation in November at over 13,000,000,000%. Some independent economists estimate current inflation is in the quadrillions. As a result, the cash economy has largely collapsed, replaced by barter and foreign currency, neither of which permits most Zimbabweans access to desperately needed goods and services.
- **The impact of hyperinflation is devastating.** Those fortunate enough to be employed now find that insurance companies can no longer afford to cover even urgent medical care, including surgery and dialysis. Salaries cannot keep pace with the skyrocketing increase in fuel, electricity, and food prices. Basic commodities such as milk and meat are only available in foreign currency shops or on the black market at exorbitant prices.
- **The World Bank estimates that just six percent of the working-age population is employed in the formal sector.** The majority of Zimbabweans are now working informally or not at all.
- **Power and water outages occur daily across large swaths of the city,** placing large sectors of the population at serious risk. In some communities that have gone without water for months or years, citizens have dug crude shallow wells in which water sometimes mixes with sewage flowing from broken sewer pipes. Garbage collection has ceased in many areas of Harare. These practices contribute to cholera and other disease outbreaks.

**Prices Continue to Soar**  
**Parallel Exchange Rate:**  
 \$500,000,000: US\$1  
**Bread:** Z\$500,000,000/loaf  
**Sugar:** Z\$1,500,000,000/2 kg  
**Gas and Diesel:**  
 Z\$500,000,000/liter

