



## Remarks On Recent Events in Zimbabwe

**James McGee, U.S. Ambassador to Zimbabwe**

Via Digital Video Conference  
June 6, 2008

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** Okay. Let me (inaudible) five U.S. diplomats and two locally employed staff, accompanied at times by four British diplomats, were detained and harassed by government security (inaudible) officials and their supporters in violation of the Vienna Convention during a pre-election assessment visit in Mashonaland Central Province.

Despite (inaudible), two vehicles carrying U.S. personnel were detained for more than five hours by police. Now my mission is closely monitoring the impact of this (inaudible) community and is using public and private diplomatic tools to refute regime propaganda and condemn the government's illegal activities. I'll be happy to get into more detail if you'd like.

**MR. GALLEGOS:** Thank you, sir. Why don't I – I'll take some questions here starting with Michelle Keleman, NPR.

**QUESTION:** I'd like to ask you actually about the cutoff of aid groups, what you can tell us about that. How many U.S. aid groups are affected by that decision?

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** Okay. The Minister (inaudible) Public Service, Labor and Social Welfare Nicholas Goche sent a (inaudible) memorandum to (inaudible) on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June, saying that (inaudible), he has cut off all humanitarian relief activities. We have three primary U.S. groups that are affected by this with about 780,000 people, a total over 1 million people. We have all the NGOs. In fact, you can count all the (inaudible) proclamation by the government.

**MR. GALLEGOS:** Sue Fleming with Reuters.

**QUESTION:** Can we get clarification with the three U.S. groups?

**MR. GALLEGOS:** Oh, could you – they've asked for clarification on which three U.S. groups are affected.

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** Okay. USAID Food For (inaudible) via C-SAFE, USAID Office of Foreign Disaster non-food humanitarian assistance, and finally, (inaudible) are the three U.S. groups that are affected.

**QUESTION:** (Laughter.)

**MR. GALLEGOS:** I'm sorry, would you mind repeating that, sir? They've -- you cut out during the third one.

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** Okay. U.S. – yeah, USAID Food For Peace via C-SAFE. C-SAFE is a local NGO. USAID Office of Foreign Disaster, non-humanitarian assistance. And finally – I'm sorry, let's stop it right there. The other one is the Office of Foreign (inaudible), which is non-food humanitarian support, because food really is not considered in that particular one, OFDA.

**MR. GALLEGOS:** Okay. Thank you. And then I'll go to --

**QUESTION:** Yeah, Sue Fleming from Reuters.

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** Two food – two are directly food, one is non-food support.

**QUESTION:** Just a quick question. Do you think that the runoff election should take place in the current climate? What's your assessment of that? And then secondly, how do you think South Africa (inaudible) the situation? They don't seem to be doing a great deal.

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** To answer your first question, yes, I think the runoff election should move forward. Anything less than a runoff, I think, would be just giving the Mugabe regime a victory that (inaudible) do not deserve. This – the Mugabe regime has entered into a campaign of violence and intimidation to ensure that people do not vote. But we're really (inaudible) with the strength and resilience of the Zimbabwean people. We're hearing and more of the old Zimbabwean adage, "You can only kill me once." And people are saying, we're going to go out there, we're going to vote no matter what (inaudible).

And this ties into your second question about South Africa. We need a strong, strong response, especially from regional organizations such as SADC and the African Union, to rapidly get election observers into Zimbabwe to do two things: Number one, to protect the people, and number one, to protect the vote of the people. South Africa, I think, plays a (inaudible) between both of those. We still continue to work on – through diplomatic channels to try to get as many election observers into Zimbabwe as possible. But the key issue in my mind is that we need to have those folks here last week.

**QUESTION:** With one more question. Morgan Tsvangirai was detained twice this week. Do you fear for his life? Do you think that he is actually going to really survive to take part in this election? How much at risk is he?

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** I'm sorry, you cut out totally. I cannot hear you.

**QUESTION:** I said do you fear for Morgan Tsvangirai's life? He's been detained twice this week and he seems to be under serious threat by the authorities.

**STAFF:** Do you fear for Morgan Tsvangirai's life?

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** Okay, I – the first part of your question I think I hear – I heard, which is: Do I fear for Morgan Tsvangirai's life? Given the excesses of the government here, we are not sure what they will do. Mr. Tsvangirai and his security team are taking very strong precautions. But as I think you mentioned, he has been detained twice already this week.

One of the things that we in the diplomatic community want to assure the entire world is that we're keeping a light on the activities of the government here in Zimbabwe,

and hopefully, that will deter them from doing anything that might be detrimental to Mr. Tsvangirai.

**MR. GALLEGOS:** Sylvie.

**QUESTION:** Sylvie Lanteaume from AFP. Mr. Ambassador, I would like to go back to the incident of the diplomats yesterday. The Secretary ruled out sanctions for the time being and – but she said that we have to look at what more we can do. I was wondering if you are considering other response -- maybe a stronger response after the election.

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** Well, first of all, we have to wait to see what happens during the runoff. If, like so many people are theorizing, that this election is stolen by the Mugabe regime, then we will take a look at what our response will be. The United States Government is not usually happy to do business with rogue regimes, and that's exactly what this would be.

The Mugabe regime, as I mentioned earlier, started a campaign of violence and intimidation in the countryside. And they've displaced over 30,000 people, (inaudible) these people in the upcoming runoff.

**MR. GALLEGOS:** Kim?

**QUESTION:** Kim Ghattas from the BBC. I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit more about the exact circumstances that the diplomats – in which the diplomats were detained and harassed yesterday, and what exactly they were doing at the meeting of the MDC. And also, last month, Robert Mugabe threatened to kick you out of the country. In light of yesterday's events, are you worried about something like this happening?

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** The team from the U.S. Embassy, my team from the U.S. Embassy and the team from the British Embassy were in Mashonaland Central (inaudible) idea, to get a flavor of the pre-runoff issues in that area.

Number one, we had fairly good reports that violence was continuing in that area, that ZANU-PF operatives – excuse me, were intimidating the people. So we were – we were on one of our regular missions around the country to try to get firsthand knowledge, information on what was happening on the run-up to the elections. Let me say that the U.S. and the British embassies are not alone in doing this. The European Union, the (inaudible) have been involved in doing exactly the same thing. And unfortunately, I hate to report to you, but they've been harassed also, not to the extent of what we had happen to us (inaudible).

And to answer your second question, let me just say that we are doing our job here in Harare. We will continue to do our job. If the Government of Zimbabwe sees fit to ask me to leave, so be it. (Inaudible.)

**MR. GALLEGOS:** Viola?

**QUESTION:** Mr. Ambassador, this is Viola Gienger from Bloomberg News. Regarding the aid cut-off – I gather that only applies to humanitarian aid, not development aid? And how much U.S. money is spent per year on humanitarian aid for Zimbabwe, or in the current year, and has that been increasing? And do we have any development aid going in there as well, and may that – might that be under threat? And finally, what are your options in regard to the clampdown on humanitarian aid?

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** To respond to the first part of your question, we are trying to pin down exactly what Minister Goche meant when he said a suspension of aid. In the circular that he sent around, he specifically (inaudible) humanitarian aid and assistance, but now it seems like they're trying to expand that to include developmental assistance also.

The United States government last year spent a little over 200 million on Zimbabwe, and 171 million of that total was directly for food assistance. The rest was pretty much for medical assistance in the area of HIV.

We – I'm sorry, can you hear me? We're bad again.

**QUESTION:** Yes, we can hear you.

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** Okay. We do not right now have a clear indication of what this will mean for our operations here. Our two major partners have been totally put out of business at the local level. They've retreated all their people back to district offices or back here into Harare. They do have enough food stocks out in these areas they do –they believe, at least through the election, but if the – if this situation continues much beyond then we're going to see some massive, massive starvation here in Zimbabwe.

**MR. GALLEGOS:** Charley?

**QUESTION:** Charley Keyes, CNN. Please, Mr. Ambassador, do you feel free to travel anywhere and do U.S. officials? Or do you feel bound by restrictions by the Zimbabwe regime?

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** Charley, I feel absolutely free to travel wherever I wish and my staff feels the same way. We actually have a diplomatic note from the government of Zimbabwe going back to 2006, saying that we are free to travel anywhere in this country and that it's only a formality for us to announce to the government when we do plan to travel, (inaudible) it's not a request for permission. So we are – we continue to operate under that guidance and we will continue to travel around the country.

**MR. GALLEGOS:** Lach?

**QUESTION:** Hi. It's Lachlan Carmichael from AFP. I wanted to ask you, do you think the Mugabe regime is using food as a weapon? In other words, suspending the aid work to intimidate people to maybe vote the way he wants?

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** Lach, there's no question about that. That's exactly what is happening. We have confirmed reports from around the nation that (inaudible) only if they present their ZANU-PF, or the Mugabe party card. If you have an MDC card, you can receive food, but first you have to (inaudible) identity card or your – national identity card to the government officials, which means that they'll hold on to it until after the election. Again, you will not be able to vote. It's a very well-orchestrated campaign.

**QUESTION:** I'm sorry, can you repeat that?

**QUESTION:** Yeah, could you repeat that? They were – they didn't quite hear about the card. What kind of card? If you could explain the card again, the identity card?

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** Okay. People have ZANU-PF or MDC voting cards. It affiliates you with the party. If you can come up and show that you're a member of ZANU-PF, you can access food through the government. If you're a member of MDC, you either have to turn in your voting card or (inaudible) to get food. Now, what that means is that the government will then hold on to these cards until the election is completed, and you will not be allowed to vote. The only way you can access food is give up your right to vote.

**MR. GALLEGOS:** Thank you.

**QUESTION:** How would you describe this action? I mean, this is a very serious action in international law.

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** Well, first of all it's a (inaudible) to the constitution of Zimbabwe. It's absolutely illegal. It's contrary to all of the agreements that Zimbabwe has signed regionally with SADC, the African Union. And you're absolutely correct. It goes against international law. But I think that we're dealing with a desperate regime here that will do anything to stay in power.

**MR. GALLEGOS:** Nina?

**QUESTION:** Nina Donaghy, Fox News. Have you had any personal conversations with the Secretary? And what do you make of what happened at the U.N. Security Council yesterday when South Africa and Indonesia cast doubt on your version of events yesterday?

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** Nina, I have not had any personal communications with the Secretary and for what happened at the United Nations, we generally leave that to our fine colleges in IO, International Organizations.

**QUESTION:** Jay Solomon with the *Wall Street Journal*. How would you describe China's sort of help or non-help in pressuring the Mugabe regime in the current situation?

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** China has a very large mission here. They're very secretive. We really don't see very much of them around Zimbabwe. A lot of anecdotal evidence of what they're doing, and the Chinese population seems to be growing in the country. But we don't see the massive numbers of Chinese small businesses here in Zimbabwe that you see in many other African countries.

**QUESTION:** Is the government, do you think, putting enough pressure on Mugabe from Beijing?

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** I cannot answer that. I have no indication of what's happening from Beijing.

**MR. GALLEGOS:** Okay, do we have any other questions?

**QUESTION:** Yes. Daniel Rynjtes, *Feature Story News* and SABC. I just wanted to ask, can you clarify the situation with regards to what aid is getting – is able to get in with these new rules, and what aid is able to operate and what isn't able to operate? Well, we know what isn't able to operate, but is any aid getting through still under the new rules that the Zimbabwe regime has put down?

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** Well, this only started a couple of days ago, and from what we can see right now, no. No aid is getting – no humanitarian aid is getting through into the countryside of Zimbabwe.

**MR. GALLEGOS:** Matt Lee.

**QUESTION:** Yeah, this is Matt Lee with AP. I'm just wondering, do you see any cracks at all in the Mugabe administration? I mean, is there anyone who, that you can deal with or is there anyone that could mount, I don't know, a credible campaign to kind of ease him out?

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** Matt, there are several power factions within ZANU-PF. It's a party that is in transition right now. The first crack we all noticed here in the first election when Simba Makoni left ZANU-PF and started his own political party. Mr. Makoni gathered about 7.5, maybe 8 percent of the vote in the election. Right now, he has refused so far to back either candidate in the runoff. Under the constitution of Zimbabwe, only the two leading vote-getters are allowed to go into (inaudible). Makoni could be a kingmaker in that regard with the 7 to 8 percent of the vote that he received. But so far, he's staying on the sidelines.

There are other factions within ZANU-PF, one headed by the Vice President Joyce Mujuru and her husband Rex Mujuru, former general head of the armies here in Zimbabwe. They're being very, very quiet right now. We've not heard a lot from them.

Then you have the (inaudible) which includes President Mugabe, Minister Mnangagwa, the head of the military and the head of the police. And finally, I think you have a very strong faction that's a (inaudible) faction (inaudible) Dr. Gideon Gono, who is head of the central bank. And because he does control the purse strings here in Zimbabwe, he is a very, very important person.

**QUESTION:** What about the army and the security forces? Are they –

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** As I mentioned, the head of the military, the head of the police, Chihuri and Chiwenga --

**QUESTION:** The rank and file, though.

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** In the rank and file? Right now, those folks are still loyal, as far as we can tell. We are starting to notice quite a few of the – especially in the police forces, quite a few of their people during the regular election (inaudible) the 29<sup>th</sup> actually voted for MDC. We're certain of that. Right now, these folks are being told if you vote for Tsvangirai, you have to leave your job. They're also being forced to (inaudible) in front of their superiors. They're doing what's known as a postal vote, which would be the same as our absentee ballot, and they have to fill that absentee ballot out in front of their superiors to ensure that they're voting the right way.

**MR. GALLEGOS:** Charlie.

**QUESTION:** Charlie Wolfson from CBS. Would you like – what would you like to see, if anything, the South Africans do or other neighbors do? Are there concrete steps they could be taking now?

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** I think, Charlie that we need to see much more pressure from the regional body SADC. And South Africa is such a (inaudible) in SADC. We've had very, very good responses from other members of SADC – Botswana, Zambia, Tanzania, even Angola to a certain extent. The South Africans have stayed back and continued to press on the issue of quiet diplomacy, and right now we're seeing that quiet diplomacy is not helping South Africa with its own internal problem (inaudible) episodes of violence that we're seeing over in that country. So we do need to see a rapid step-up from SADC on how they're dealing with the situation in Zimbabwe.

**MR. GALLEGOS:** Kirit Radia.

**QUESTION:** Kirit Radia with ABC News. Mr. Ambassador, you mentioned that \$171 million went to food aid. Assuming that you can get food aid back into the country, and given that you said that they're using food as a weapon, is there any consideration of reducing that or altogether cancelling it?

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** Not at the current time, Kirit. We really don't want to see the people of Zimbabwe suffer for the excesses of its government.

**MR. GALLEGOS:** All right, anyone else?

**QUESTION:** Yes. I have – Viola Gienger from Bloomberg News. I'm – can you clarify, when you're talking about how the government is using food aid to manipulate the votes with the voting cards, are you talking about the foreign food aid? And how is it that the government is managing to manipulate the foreign food aid, or is it something

else?

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** No, we're not talking – we're not talking about foreign food aid; we're talking about local food aid. The government provides a fair amount of food aid on its own. But it will only distribute this food to people (inaudible) who vote for ZANU-PF.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** There are communities that are identified as opposition party or MDC party strongholds that receive no food from the government, whatsoever.

**QUESTION:** This is Matt Lee with AP again. And I'm asking this seriously, but what is wrong with these people? What is it about – (laughter) – Bob and his cronies that makes them think that they deserve to stay in power?

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** Everyone runs around calling (inaudible) and talking about their independent struggle credentials. I think right now that that's all a bunch of garbage. What we have is a bunch of greedy people who want to remain in power at all costs.

The other factor that we have to look at here, and there's a lot of people in this government that have exceptionally bloody hands, and these people are somewhat concerned – they're very concerned about the potential of justice or (inaudible) comes into power.

**MR. GALLEGOS:** All right, Mr. Ambassador, I appreciate your help, your time, and your assistance. Have a good afternoon.

**AMBASSADOR MCGEE:** Thanks.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

2008/466

 [BACK TO TOP](#)

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