

The Looming Crisis in Zimbabwe

saferaccess



This information is provided for the benefit of the humanitarian community and is a result of research conducted by Safer Access. The circumstances and recommendations indicated by this report may change.

All readers are therefore advised to act accordingly to capacity and the latest information

Background

saferaccess

Elections in 1980 resulted in a victory for Robert Mugabe and the ZANU-PF Party. This began what has become the longest rule of any political leader in Africa, 27 years, which seems as if it may soon come to an end. Although there has often been speculation that Mugabe's rule would end, to date he has survived each crisis.

Past internal dissent has not been dealt with lightly by the Mugabe regime. Between 1980 and 1989, Zimbabwean military units, notably the North Korean trained Fifth Brigade (since disbanded), committed atrocities against their own people. This program of genocide, euphemistically known as the "Gukurahundi," it is estimated that as many as 20,000 ethnic Ndebele were killed during this period.

More recently, Operation Murambatsvina ("Drive out the Trash") has targeted the homes of urban and rural poor, who form much of the anti-Mugabe opposition. Ostensibly a campaign of "urban renewal" aimed at removing slums, it has affected an estimated 2.4 million people and created hundreds of thousands of IDPs.

Faced now with internal dissent within the ZANU party, an economy spiralling out of control, increasing international pressure and perhaps the seeds of grass roots opposition, Zimbabwe may soon see massive changes. The impact of these changes, both positive and negative, will have an effect on humanitarians and their beneficiaries throughout the region.



Robert Mugabe



Morgan Tsvangirai

This information is provided for the benefit of the humanitarian community and is a result of research conducted by Safer Access. The circumstances and recommendations indicated by this report may change.

All readers are therefore advised to act accordingly to capacity and the latest information

The Economic Crisis



Zimbabwe's economy has continued to shrink by an average of 5% every year since 1999, due to the combined influence of lower export earnings, shortages of foreign exchange, and massive disruption to the agricultural sector due to the political redistribution of productive land. Exact unemployment figures are unclear, but are undoubtedly over 70%. Inflation currently stands at 1,730 %, making every day life nearly untenable for the average Zimbabwean.

International sanctions have not helped the economic situation, although Zimbabwe has barely managed to avoid expulsion from the IMF in large part due to support from South Africa. Hoped for funds from China have not been forthcoming, although Chinese support for the Mugabe government is a key element in the international political manoeuvring of the regime.

The economy is also affected by an ongoing shortage of food caused by drought, severely affecting crops in 2001, 2002, 2004 and 2006. Years of shortages have created widespread malnutrition, which coupled with a nearly unchecked HIV epidemic, have created a crisis in the health sector. Zimbabwe is believed to have the fourth highest national HIV infection rate in the world, somewhere in the vicinity of 25% of the adult population.

The economic crisis has created a large number of both IDPs and refugees, many choosing to settle in South Africa. Foreign currency remittances from South Africa and further abroad are responsible in large part for keeping the parts of the Zimbabwean economy functioning.

This information is provided for the benefit of the humanitarian community and is a result of research conducted by Safer Access. The circumstances and recommendations indicated by this report may change.

All readers are therefore advised to act accordingly to capacity and the latest information

Transition to a post-Mugabe Government



Mugabe has been such an all-pervasive presence in Zimbabwean politics and daily life since coming to power in 1980, that it is almost unimaginable to conceive of a post-Mugabe government. He has been ruthless in suppressing opposition, both within his own party and amongst opposition parties. He maintains sufficient loyalty amongst the police and armed forces that a military coup is unlikely. He has so far avoided appointing a political successor from within ZANU-PF, ensuring that there is no clear claim to future power by any individual within the government.

The strongest opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), led by Morgan Tsvangirai, has been weakened in the recent past by government attacks and intimidation aimed at their constituents. Currently holding 41 of the 150 parliamentary seats, it is not clear if the MDC truly is a viable challenge to the ZANU-PF in next years elections, given ongoing government harassment of supporters. This includes the recent severe beating (while in police custody) of Morgan Tsvangirai himself after he attempted to address an opposition rally.

Perhaps the most likely scenario for a transition of power in the near term would involve moves to oust Mugabe by potential successors within the ZANU-PF party itself. Several leading members of the party have the potential to replace him, although in the past Mugabe has been quick to expel anyone who expressed their intent to succeed him. The ZANU-PF leadership is drawn from party members who fought in the struggle for liberation in the 1960s and 1970s. This leadership pool is aging, and given the low life expectancy in Zimbabwe (a dismal 40 years for males), it is also shrinking. Engagement with the country's youth has been more effectively conducted by the MDC, a factor which may eventually tip the balance of power.

This information is provided for the benefit of the humanitarian community and is a result of research conducted by Safer Access. The circumstances and recommendations indicated by this report may change.

All readers are therefore advised to act accordingly to capacity and the latest information

Transition to a post-Mugabe Government

The logo for Safer Access, featuring the word "saferaccess" in white lowercase letters on a green rounded rectangular background. A faint world map is visible behind the text.

Although there has been widespread international condemnation of the Mugabe regime in the past, by the United Nations, the United States, the United Kingdom, elements of the Commonwealth and others, it has had little real effect.

Recently, South Africa has begun to take a harder stance on Zimbabwe, as opposed to their previous policy of “quiet diplomacy.” This change of policy may in part be driven by the fact that South Africa will be hosting the 2010 World Cup, and wishes to ensure that a more stable regime is in place in order to lessen the chance of negative events having an impact. This may prove to be a pressure from a source that Mugabe finds harder to ignore or simply label as a vestige of colonial era racism.

Other regional leaders are expected to also add pressure on Mugabe during an upcoming Southern African Development Community summit in Tanzania. Although Mugabe has long been respected by African leaders due to his role in the struggle for independence from white rule, the years of authoritarian rule and crackdowns on political opposition may finally outweigh his early record.

It is possible that Zimbabwe has reached a breaking point due to the ongoing economic crisis, reaction to continued excesses by the Mugabe government, and an increase in external pressures. There have even been some allegations in the international press of secret talks between ZANU-PF and MDC leaders to discuss how to hasten the departure of Mugabe. Certainly the refusal of the ZANU-PF to ratify Mugabe’s request to have his mandate extended to 2010 is also very telling. Although there have been many similar predictions in preceding years, the lead up to the elections scheduled to be held in 2008 may form the backdrop to substantive change.

This information is provided for the benefit of the humanitarian community and is a result of research conducted by Safer Access. The circumstances and recommendations indicated by this report may change.

All readers are therefore advised to act accordingly to capacity and the latest information

Leadership Contenders in a post-Mugabe Government



A short list of leadership contenders is included below to aid in determining triggers and key events that could lead to security crises.

Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF)

- Solomon Mujuru – Of Shona-Zezuru ethnicity, and also known as Rex Nhongo. He is a former head of the Zimbabwe National Army, and continues to wield influence despite having no official position.
- Emmerson Mnangagwa – Of Shona-Karanga ethnicity, he is the Speaker of the House. In past government roles, he has been implicated as a leader in the Gukurahundi.
- Simba Makoni – A former government Minister, currently without portfolio.
- Herbert Murerwa – Formerly the Minister of Finance, he was removed from the post on 6 February, 2007 by Mugabe, due to Murerwa's ambitions as a potential successor.
- General Vitalis Zvinavashe – Of Shona ethnicity, a retired Chief of Defence Forces with considerable political links.
- Sydney Sekeramayi – Of Shona-Zezuru ethnicity, he is the Minister of Defence and as such may bring the support of the armed forces to any bid for the presidency
- John Nkomo – Of Ndebele ethnicity, he is the Secretary-General of the ZANU-PF and may be seen as a “consensus” figure because his appointment would break the pattern of Shona dominance in government

This information is provided for the benefit of the humanitarian community and is a result of research conducted by Safer Access. The circumstances and recommendations indicated by this report may change.

All readers are therefore advised to act accordingly to capacity and the latest information

Leadership Contenders in a post-Mugabe Government



A short list of leadership contenders is included below to aid in determining triggers and key events that could lead to security crises.

Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)

- Morgan Tsvangirai – Of Shona ethnicity, Tsvangirai is an outspoken critic of Mugabe who has survived at least three assassination attempts and has been charged with treason by the Mugabe government on two occasions.

Others

- Jonathan Moyo – A former ZANU-PF minister ousted by Mugabe, he holds a parliamentary seat as an independent, and has formed a new political party, the United People's Movement (UPM).

This information is provided for the benefit of the humanitarian community and is a result of research conducted by Safer Access. The circumstances and recommendations indicated by this report may change.

All readers are therefore advised to act accordingly to capacity and the latest information

Arrest of Morgan Tsvangirai – 28 March, 2007



The arrest of Morgan Tsvangirai and twenty other MDC staff members from their headquarters on 28 March, 2007, may be a pivotal point in Zimbabwe politics.

The arrests were made by police, it is claimed, as part of their investigation into petrol bombing incidents against a ZANU-PF office and a police station earlier in the week. The police presence in the area of the MDC offices was heavy immediately prior to the arrests, with the area cordoned off prior to police entering the MDC offices. Computer equipment belonging to the MDC was also seized as part of the raids. It was widely believed that the MDC was preparing to hold a press conference regarding the earlier arrest and beating of Tsvangirai, a rumour which may have prompted the raid. It is unclear whether Tsvangirai will actually be prosecuted for any crimes, or whether this arrest will again lead to his eventual release. Given the level of international attention focused on the issue, it is most likely that he will be charged with some crime in order to give the arrest a veneer of propriety.

The raid may also have been timed to coincide with Mugabe's arrival in Tanzania for the SADC summit, and may represent both an internal and external message regarding his hold on power. Certainly it is a strong message to regional leaders that, whatever their opinions, Mugabe still maintains a tight grip on the reins of power within Zimbabwe.

There has so far been no public reaction to these arrests within Zimbabwe, although demonstrations might very well be expected, which will inevitably lead to clashes with police and further arrests. Although the raid is certainly a demonstration of strength on the part of Mugabe, it may serve to create a reaction or series of reactions that will be difficult for him to contain.

This information is provided for the benefit of the humanitarian community and is a result of research conducted by Safer Access. The circumstances and recommendations indicated by this report may change.

All readers are therefore advised to act accordingly to capacity and the latest information

Possible Outcomes



Should there be a sudden change in the government, or an outpouring of opposition sentiment in the form of street protests, there are a number of possible outcomes that are of concern to humanitarian actors operating in the region:

- either event may produce increased numbers of IDPs, as well as refugees along the South African and Botswana borders. This movement would be accompanied by increased needs for food, shelter, health care facilities, sanitation and security in the areas of displacement.
- depending on the means of transition, there may be armed conflict, either between factions within the ZANU-PF, or between the ZANU-PF and the MDC. Both police and military units could participate in this conflict, and depending on the level of fragmentation within the ruling party, could participate on both sides.
- demonstrations or strikes are a possible outcome of political turmoil, particularly in Harare
- vulnerable children could be at increasing risks to their safety as they are used as pawns in violent demonstrations by political parties
- already fragile agriculture may suffer due to population displacements and conflict, causing further issues of nutrition into the mid-term
- agencies working in Zimbabwe are already subject to political pressures since the passing of the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Act in December, 2004, which allows the government to close any NGO of which it doesn't approve. This act may be enforced with more vigour as assistance to those in need becomes further politicized.

This information is provided for the benefit of the humanitarian community and is a result of research conducted by Safer Access. The circumstances and recommendations indicated by this report may change.

All readers are therefore advised to act accordingly to capacity and the latest information

Recommendations



Aid and development agencies working in the region should begin to consider the following matters in order to mitigate the additional risks posed by the possible deterioration of the situation in Zimbabwe:

- Agencies should review and revise their current security plans, and ensure that they work with their staff to define clear signs to watch for that could indicate further deterioration of the situation, and that would trigger a move to higher levels of preparedness
- Agencies should ensure that hibernation and evacuation plans are current and understood by staff, and should consider conducting rehearsals.
- All agencies in the region must take additional steps to ensure that there are adequate levels of information sharing on matters related to security, and that this information is shared in a secure manner that does not place the recipients at risk due to the interception of information by government authorities
- Methods of effectively nationalizing programmes during periods of evacuation or relocation must be considered and discussed with key staff.
- As plans to increase the capacity of programmes in response to increased needs are discussed (such as in the case of a dramatic increase in the IDP and refugee population), adequate increased security measures must also be considered and built into budgets

This information is provided for the benefit of the humanitarian community and is a result of research conducted by Safer Access. The circumstances and recommendations indicated by this report may change.

All readers are therefore advised to act accordingly to capacity and the latest information

About Safer Access



Safer Access is a network of humanitarian safety expertise formed to better enable the provision of humanitarian and development aid. It is our overall objective to improve the capacity of relief and development organisations working in insecure and complicated environments to deliver life-saving assistance to those most in need.

Our work is first and foremost beneficiary-focused, innovative and aims to have an impact across the aid sector. Our belief is that the best way to ensure continued access to beneficiaries in even the most complex and fluid situations is for organizations to institutionalize effective security planning and procedures from the outset. Our intent is always to teach and facilitate best practises – practices which both safeguard staff security while also enabling access to those most in need. Our passion is to help enable safer and more effective operating practices, from those employed in management to those used by the teams in the field

We understand and are experienced in the challenges that aid workers, both national and international, face everyday. Safer Access is a platform for the collection and distribution of expertise and information to those that need it most. To that end, we are committed to the free and open sharing of critical information – including analysis and best practices – amongst humanitarian and development organisations so as to enable them to better manage their operating risks.

This information is provided for the benefit of the humanitarian community and is a result of research conducted by Safer Access. The circumstances and recommendations indicated by this report may change.

Should you have any questions regarding this report, or about what Safer Access can do to help you achieve your goals in difficult operating environments, contact us at enquiries@saferaccess.org or visit our website at www.saferaccess.org. Many other reports are also available at our website.

This information is provided for the benefit of the humanitarian community and is a result of research conducted by Safer Access. The circumstances and recommendations indicated by this report may change.

All readers are therefore advised to act accordingly to capacity and the latest information