

## **Zimbabwe – A Situation Report in mid June 2020**

### **Objective**

The objective of this report is to distil some of the significant developments in Zimbabwe over the last few months. For ease of reference, we focus on a number of topics, such as the economy and Covid-19, but the reality is that these topics are closely inter-twined, although the two major forces must always be human and natural, in other words politics and the weather.

### **Political situation**

Zanu-PF remains in sole control of the country. Emmerson Mnangagwa continues to be the President but it appears that he holds this position only because the army leaders want to retain a veneer of respectability – General Constantino Chiwenga, one of the two Vice-Presidents, pulls most of the strings! A number of one-time Zanu-PF ministers, in particular Jonathan Moyo, lob stones into the Zanu-PF pond from the relative safety of South Africa – but they seem to have little effect.

The MDC remains splintered with (Pastor) Chamisa recognised as the leader of the dominant faction. However only on 5 June, a number of MDC ‘Chamisa faction’ leaders, including Tendai Biti, were arrested for trying to enter the MDC head office in Harare (the Police claimed that the rival MDC faction should have had the right to the MDC office). It is a great shame that the opposition cannot come together to challenge Zanu-PF.

### **Human Rights**

Human rights continue to be violated by the authorities at will. There have been so many abuses since the Mnangagwa regime took over that Amnesty International accused him in 2019 of a ‘ruthless’ and systematic crackdown on human rights.

One of the most recent violations to receive widespread publicity was the abduction of three young, female MDC activists (one of whom was a MDC member of parliament). In May (this year) these women were demonstrating in Harare against the Government’s lack of provision for the poor in the Covid-19 lockdown, when they were arrested at a police roadblock and carried off in a van by masked men. They were found the next morning at the roadside in Bindura (60 miles away), having been stripped of their clothes, forced to drink each other’s urine and sexually assaulted. The police, of course, denied any responsibility and the Government’s information minister, Nick Mangwana, commented that the women were participating in an illegal demonstration. Today (22 June) these women are actually in the high security prison, Chikirubi, because the state has accused them of fabricating their cases – bail was refused.

### **Corruption**

Zimbabwe is rated by Transparency International as 158<sup>th</sup> out of 180 states in its international league table of corruption. There are no countries in Southern Africa with a worse rating for corruption! Corruption has permeated almost every aspect of society and the economy – from the Church to gambling – and it dominates politics.

In February 2020 officials of the Grain Marketing Board were accused, in Parliament, of selling in foreign countries, for private gain, grain bought with public monies – thereby causing deprivation and exacerbating the hunger of Zimbabweans.

Another corruption crisis has erupted in only the last week. The Health Minister (if you please!), Obadiah Moyo, was taken into custody on 18 June for his part in the supply of US\$300 worth of

Covid-19 test kits from China to NatPharm, the publicly owned pharmaceutical supplier, at a price of US\$66,000. One of the beneficiaries of this huge mark-up is said to be Collins Mnangagwa, the President's son, those who bear the burden are the general public.

## **Economy**

The Finance Minister, Mthuli Ncube, who was appointed by Emmerson Mnangagwa back in 2018, came into the role with impressive credentials – one-time Chief Economist and then Vice President of the African Development Bank – but has singularly failed to improve the economy. He attempted to move the legal currency from the US dollar to the Zimbabwean dollar, converting all US\$ bank deposits into ZW\$ on a one-for-one basis and then forbidding the use of the US\$ in transactions within the country. But because of corruption and the totally unbalanced nature of the Zimbabwean economy, the inflation rate has multiplied to around 800%. In March 2020, because of currency shortages and the lack of credibility of the Zimbabwean dollar, Ncube had to revert to a dual currency system – US\$ and ZW\$ alongside one another – however today most businesses will not accept the latter! Last week, one US dollar would buy 80 Zimbabwean dollars (if you could find them!).

The economy of the country is in tatters – 90% of the urban workforce is unemployed and there is next to no manufacturing and tourism (except at Victoria Falls), agricultural production remains depressed as a result of the land reform in 2001 – 2003 and low levels of rainfall in 2016, 2019 and 2020. Today, approximately 75% of the food consumed in Zimbabwe has to be imported. The mining sector, responsible for about 45% of the Country's GDP, is also suffering because of long-term neglect of the power supply facilities and the transport infrastructure and the question mark over possible indigenisation of ownership of the industry or sections of it (like platinum).

At a meeting of the Zanu-PF leaders in May 2020, Ncube was said to come under sustained fire because of the failings of the Zimbabwean economy – they were afraid that their chances of re-election in 2023 were being harmed by the economic crisis. His response was to tell them that he was not a magician! But more seriously for Ncube, his appeals to the IMF for assistance back in April 2020 fell on deaf ears – because the economy is structurally unsound and the country is certainly not creditworthy.

All this means that Zimbabwean families are more and more dependent upon remittances from abroad and the informal economy. The former are under real strain partly because of the situation in South Africa and, along with the latter, have, for March, April, May and June 2020, been abruptly curtailed by stay at home rules introduced by the Government because of Covid-19. The situation in the settlements around the big cities is now desperate. The possibility of this fermenting a physical response cannot be ruled out.

## **Weather**

After devastating droughts in 2016 and 2019, the situation in 2020 has shown no improvement. Rainfall statistics are difficult to find – if only because the website of the Meteorological Services Department of the Zimbabwean Government is broken down! However, climate change has been taking its toll on Southern African states – and has resulted in drier summers in much of Zimbabwe: there is a close relationship between El Nino events in the Pacific and dry summers in the country, and these do seem to be occurring very much more frequently.

Of course, Cyclone Idai compounded the disastrous weather conditions suffered by the country in March 2019 – it devastated the south eastern corner, where the towns of Chimanimani and Chipinge are located, killing 340 people and leaving vast acreages of land ravaged.

### **Agriculture**

Zimbabwe's major agricultural product is maize, though other commercial crops would include sorghum, millet, wheat, tobacco and cotton. In addition there used to be a thriving livestock industry but this has fallen to almost negligible levels over the last 20 years since the farm invasions of 2001-03.

Maize is the staple foodstuff for Zimbabweans. The total consumption is around 1,600,000 tonnes each year. Annual production levels of maize during the mid years of the last decade were in the vicinity of 1,300,000 tonnes, meaning that 200 - 300,000 tonnes had to be imported each year. In 2018, 1,700,000 tonnes were produced in the country but in 2019 the harvest was only 780,000 tonnes. This year, the output is expected to be even lower – meaning that the deficit is likely to be approaching 1,000,000 tonnes.

### **Hunger**

The country does not have the foreign exchange reserves required to import such a large amount of maize. As a result, prices within the country have been multiplying and supplies have been increasingly difficult to source. Our partners in Bulawayo are having to scour the Midlands for maize or mealie meal because it has become almost impossible to find the quantities they distribute (now over 30 tonnes per month) in Bulawayo. They have even tried to import directly from South Africa.

Widespread humanitarian feeding schemes will be necessary to prevent starvation. Accordingly the Zimbabwean Government and the Resident UN Agency published their 'Humanitarian Response Plan' in March 2020. This covers all the major needs of the country (Food, Health, Water, Protection, Education and Shelter) – but by far the greatest need is for food – where it reports that 4.3m Zimbabweans are severely food insecure in rural areas and a further 2.2m people in urban areas are 'cereal food insecure'. The UN is looking to the World Food Programme and other international agencies such as Oxfam, Christian Aid, Cathod, Save the Children and Unicef to purchase and deliver the food. Our ZSF partners have not yet seen any evidence of such food distribution taking place – maybe it is too soon after the harvest.

But Amnesty has already accused the Government of political interference in the delivery of mealie meal, viz the preferential supply to areas and even individuals who support Zanu-PF.

### **Water**

Water is now in very short supply after two 'dry' wet seasons. For example, two out of four of Harare's dams are empty and local authorities everywhere have no money to spend on chemicals to treat what water is available so that it is safe to drink. In Hillside and Matsheumhlope (suburbs of Bulawayo) water is pumped into the pipes for only two hours a week and then it is dirty and unfit for drinking or washing. In Mazwi and Killarney, where many homeless and formerly homeless people live, water is delivered by bowser – with one delivery every eight weeks and this supplies each family with only 20 litres of water.

The impact on the rural population is potentially devastating – many boreholes have dried up, indeed according to the Rural Water Information Management System only 30% of the 55,593 water

sources that they monitor are working. There are reports that up to 50,000 cattle died last year and the situation in 2020 is going to be worse. Further cholera outbreaks are inevitable.

### **Health**

The junior doctor strike which lasted for 100 days ended in January 2020. But the health system in the country remains close to collapse as there is no foreign exchange to buy pharmaceuticals. It is only possible to obtain medical assistance if US\$ can be proffered.

### **Covid-19**

The country has been under lockdown since March and, to date, 463 people have tested positive to the virus and four people have died. The impact of the lockdown on urban families has been severe because it has abruptly brought the informal economy to a standstill, thereby depriving them of any livelihood. On 12 June, Mnangagwa did announce a lifting of some of the restrictions so that the economy could begin to recover. People were allowed, for the first time since March, to pick up the monies that had been remitted to them by family members in foreign countries.

Nonetheless the level of infection and death is much lower than it is in the UK. Why ? Under-detection is undoubtedly one factor, another might be the fact that the average age of the population is much lower than here – and Covid-19 strikes older people much more seriously. It certainly is not because Zimbabwe has better facilities for treatment than the NHS provides.

### **Conclusion**

Zimbabwe would appear to be set on a path which will lead to a potentially catastrophic crisis, whether it will be an abyss for the ruling party we do not know, but we do know that it will mean an awful lot more suffering for the bulk of the population. They desperately need our prayerful support.

Chris Sworn

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