

# WebMemo



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## Africa Must Confront the Growing Crisis in Zimbabwe

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The news emanating this past weekend from Zimbabwe—that opposition candidate and first round presidential election winner Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party was forced to pull out of the June 27 presidential run-off—is distressing.<sup>1</sup> Tsvangirai's decision to withdraw from the election is the direct result of a three-month campaign of violence and intimidation perpetrated by President Robert Mugabe and his supporters in the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF).

Tsvangirai can be excused for withdrawing. For months, he and his supporters have been threatened, harassed, beaten, maimed, and killed simply for trying to conduct their campaign. Already more than 80 MDC supporters have been murdered through state-sponsored terror orchestrated by the police, the military, and the youth militia's masquerading as “war veterans.” Unlike Mugabe, who has instituted a campaign of terror against his own people, Tsvangirai was troubled by the possibility that his MDC supporters would pay for their votes with their very lives. After all, only days ago, Mugabe threatened to unleash widespread violence if he lost the election, boasting, “We are not going to give up our country for a mere X on a ballot. How can a ballpoint pen fight with a gun?” As recent victims of violence can attest, Mugabe's declaration of war against ordinary Zimbabweans is not an idle threat.<sup>2</sup>

In the aftermath of Tsvangirai's withdrawal, African leaders, as well as the international community, must take action to end Mugabe's campaign of terror.

**Mugabe's Legacy.** Mugabe's increasingly savage efforts to maintain political power have triggered the following economic and humanitarian crises:<sup>3</sup>

- **A humanitarian crisis.** As the popularity of the MDC increased, Mugabe cracked down repeatedly on the party's supporters. The government's 2005 Operation Murambatsvina resulted in the demolition of informal housing and markets and rendered 700,000 urban Zimbabweans homeless or unemployed. Reports estimated that 70 percent of the urban population—a key source of support for the MDC—may have lost shelter or employment. Additionally, over 2 million citizens (more than 15 percent of Zimbabwe's population) are believed to have been affected from loss of customers, employees, or markets.

Although most Zimbabweans now depend on remittances from their relatives abroad and food aid to survive, the government controls food aid distribution, dispensing it only to loyal supporters. Subsequently, hunger is widespread. More than 4 million Zimbabweans are thought to have fled the country, and the remaining 8 million have seen the country's average life expectancy drop from 57 years to just 34 years. Dozens of

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people have been tortured or killed in the three months since the first elections. Homes have been firebombed. Thousands have been beaten and injured.

- **An economic collapse.** The agricultural base of the economy was destroyed through Mugabe's "land reform" policies, which banished productive farmers from their land and awarded the property to supporters of the regime. These "land reform" policies led to chronic food shortages in a country that once served as a regional breadbasket. Unemployment currently hovers at 80 percent, and government services have collapsed. According to Leon Louw of South Africa's Free Market Foundation, inflation in Zimbabwe exceeded 1 million percent in June. That's over 100 percent an hour—in other words, after a one-hour lunch, your money is worth half as much as it did when you sat down. Needless to say, inflation, combined with price controls, has destroyed savings, led to food shortages, and crippled the formal economy.

**South African Silence.** Mugabe's despicable actions over the past decade led the U.S. and Europe to impose targeted sanctions against Zimbabwe's top government officials. As the situation in Zimbabwe worsened, however, African nations remained shamefully silent, resisting overt actions against Mugabe. Such inaction is the product of misguided loyalty to, and solidarity with, the revolutionary leader who helped lead Zimbabwe to independence. Yet Mugabe's brutal actions against his own people over the past decade reveal that that such reverence is undeserved.

Particularly shameful is the silence from South Africa. Although South African President Thabo Mbeki claimed the right to lead efforts for political reconciliation in Zimbabwe, his "quiet" diplomatic strategy has shielded Mugabe from overt criticism.

The unwillingness of South Africa to contemplate sanctions has provided an economic lifeline to the ZANU–PF regime. Indeed, few have done more than Mbeki to prop up the 84-year-old dictator, leading the MDC to publicly ask Mbeki to halt his mediation efforts. Mbeki's policy of appeasing an African despot should be an embarrassment to the African National Congress, which fought for decades to open up the political system in South Africa.

**A Welcome End to "Quiet" Diplomacy.** Thankfully, Mugabe's recent excesses seem to be too much for more enlightened African leaders to tolerate. For instance, Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Chairman Levi Mwanawasa, the president of Zambia, announced that the Zimbabwean election should be postponed due to the Mugabe regime's attacks. In addition to Mr. Mwanawasa, several other African statesmen have issued strong condemnations of Mugabe and his regime:

- President Kagame of Rwanda stated flatly that the "African continent has let down the people of Zimbabwe."
- President Yar'adua of Nigeria railed against Mugabe's lack of respect for the rule of law and stated clearly that he "does not subscribe to that sort of behavior."
- Prime Minister Odinga stood beside Secretary of State Rice last week and declared that "Zimbabwe is an eyesore for the African continent" and that a Bosnia-style multilateral force is called for to stop the violence.
- Even President dos Santos of Angola has spoken out against his long-time ally Mugabe and denounced his campaign of terror.

Such a fundamental shift by African leaders marks a clear departure from South African President Thabo Mbeki's "quiet diplomacy." After eight years, African leaders are breaking ranks to say that

1. For more information see Thomas M. Woods, "The United States Must Increase the Pressure on Zimbabwe," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 1937, May 23, 2008, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Africa/wm1937.cfm>.
2. Fact Sheet, "Hope Fades for Free Elections in Zimbabwe During Government Campaign of Terror," U.S. State Department Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, June 20, 2008, at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/104399.htm>.
3. For more information see Woods, "The United States Must Increase the Pressure on Zimbabwe," and Brett D. Schaefer, "The Crisis in Zimbabwe: How the U.S. Should Respond," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 1407, March 23, 2007, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Africa/wm1407.cfm>.

Mugabe's efforts to stay in power at all costs is not in line with the democratic movement spreading across the continent. In a remarkable break with past mediation efforts, a meeting of SADC countries on the situation in Zimbabwe decided not to invite Mbeki to participate.<sup>4</sup>

**A Role for the U.N.?** As African leaders and the international community debate the next step in resolving the Zimbabwean crisis, many are looking to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for action. South Africa actively blocked discussion of the matter during its council presidency last April, yet with the United States serving as current council president, a window of opportunity has opened. In fact, Secretary Rice made it clear at a Zimbabwe roundtable discussion held June 19 in New York that the UNSC's failure to adopt strong measures against the Mugabe regime would dramatically undermine the body's credibility.

UNSC intervention in Zimbabwe is necessary for international peace and stability. A third of Zimbabwe's 12 million people have already fled the country as political and economic refugees. The United Nations recently announced that 5 million Zimbabweans remaining in the country will face a dire food crisis in the coming weeks and months. Tens of thousands of MDC supporters have seen their homes and villages burned, which has led to large numbers of internally displaced people in the rural areas. In places like Mashonaland, Manicaland, and Masvingo, the Mugabe regime's ban on non-governmental food aid deliveries transforms political repression into a full-blown humanitarian crisis. Given the potential for large-scale refugee flows out of Zimbabwe, the UNSC must immediately intervene.

Mugabe's actions illustrate that a peaceful resolution of the situation in Zimbabwe is impossible. Outside intervention is required. The United States

and the United Kingdom should help lead the international community to take decisive action through the UNSC. Additionally, both countries should explore options to expand existing sanctions, freeze economic assets and accounts of Mugabe and other ZANU-PF officials, deny access to their respective countries to Mugabe and his representatives, and officially expel Zimbabwean diplomats. As noted by African expert J. Peter Pham:

[S]ending all sixteen diplomats—from Ambassador Machivenyika Mapuranga down to Third Secretary for Political and Administrative Affairs Loreta Evelyn Mutyora—...along with the members of their households, packing back to "Uncle Bob" in Harare [would send a clear message that] while America welcomes communication with legitimate governments, even ones with which we have political differences, given its blatant violation of the norms of its own constitutional and legal order, Mugabe's regime can no longer be considered the legitimate government of Zimbabwe and thus has no right to avail itself of diplomatic prerogatives which the international community accords to its lawfully sovereign members.<sup>5</sup>

These international efforts would be bolstered by clear encouragement and leadership from African nations. African leadership must coalesce around concerted multilateral diplomacy led by the UNSC. The council recently issued a presidential statement, the weakest possible UNSC action, condemning the government of Zimbabwe for encouraging and perpetrating the killing and beating of opposition activists.<sup>6</sup> The council should follow up on the statement with a robust resolution focused on four essential points:

1. The Mugabe regime must immediately halt its state-sponsored campaign of terror against the opposition. Failure to do so will lead to indi-

4. Paul Simao, "Mbeki 'not invited' to Zim meeting," Mail and Guardian Online, June 25, 2008, at <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2008-06-25-mbeki-not-invited-to-zimbabwe-meeting> (June 25, 2008).

5. J. Peter Pham, Ph.D., "Zimbabwe's Runoff Rip-off," World Defense Review, June 24, 2008, at <http://worlddefensereview.com/pham062408.shtml> (June 25, 2008).

6. United Nations Department of Public Information, "Security Council Condemns Violent Campaign Against Political Opposition in Zimbabwe; Regrets Failure to Hold Free, Fair Election, in Presidential Statement," Security Council Document SC/9369, June 23, 2008, at <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2008/sc9369.doc.htm> (June 25, 2008).

vidual accountability within the ranks of the police, military, government, and so-called “war veterans”;

2. Impose an immediate arms embargo on Zimbabwe to prevent the Mugabe regime from conducting an even more widespread crackdown;
3. Humanitarian relief must be allowed to be distributed by non-governmental organizations freely and without obstruction; and
4. The United Nations will be charged with immediately deploying human rights and electoral process observers to Zimbabwe in advance of newly declared elections.

The Security Council should also include, as urged by the U.S. and other nations in a council debate on June 23, a statement in the resolution declaring that “until there is a clearly free and fair second round of the presidential election, the only

legitimate basis for the government of Zimbabwe is the outcome of” the March 29 election in which Tsvangirai won a plurality.<sup>7</sup> As such, Mugabe and his representatives should be denied official credentials in the General Assembly and other U.N. bodies.

As his term in office ends, Mbeki could take steps toward redemption by leading the UNSC effort to address the crisis. If he lacks that resolve, other African leaders must step forward. Failure to act will certainly prolong Zimbabwe’s political crisis and lead to massive loss of innocent life.

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7. The Associated Press, “UN Security Council weighs Zimbabwe action as Western leaders express outrage,” IHT.com, June 23, 2008, at <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/06/23/news/UN-GEN-UN-Zimbabwe.php> (June 25, 2008).