

ZIMBABWE DEMOCRACY INSTITUTE (ZDI) POLITICAL ECONOMY MONITORING REPORT AUGUST 2020

ZIMBABWEAN CRISIS DEEPENS: GOVERNMENT DENIES



About the Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI)

The Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI) is a politically independent and not for profit public policy think-tank based in Zimbabwe. Founded and registered as a trust in terms of the laws of Zimbabwe in November 2012, ZDI serves to generate and disseminate innovative ideas, cutting-edge research and policy analysis to advance democracy, development, good governance and human rights in Zimbabwe. The institute also aims to promote open, informed and evidence-based debate by bringing together pro-democracy experts to platforms for debate. The idea is to offer new ideas to policy makers with the view to entrenching democratic practices in Zimbabwe. The ZDI researches, publishes and conducts national policy debates and conferences in democratization, good governance, public policy, human rights and transitional justice, media and democracy relations, electoral politics and international affairs.

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Summary

The month of August was characterised by a continued militarisation of state institutions, unprecedented human rights violations as evidenced by the continued incarceration of journalist Hopewell Chin'ono and Transform Zimbabwe (TZ) opposition party leader Jacob Ngarivhume of The political rot is increasingly becoming worse as witnessed by torture, abduction and murder of government critics particularly opposition members by alleged state security agents.

This comes at a time when the country is battling a deepening economic meltdown with inflation currently standing at 837.53%, second highest after Venezuela. The hyperinflationary environment has pushed prices of basic commodities beyond the reach on many ordinary citizens. The situation obtaining in the country points to a case of deepening crisis that has attracted local, regional and international attention under the pretext of an online campaign dubbed #ZimbabweanLivesMatter. The country's public health system continues to deteriorate amid the devastating effects of COVID-19.

Introduction

As the global pandemic of COVID-19 rages on, the government of Zimbabwe, like any other administration across the globe, faces the battle of striking a balance between the need to combat the spread of the virus and keeping the economy running, and in the case of Zimbabwe trying to revive the completely fallen economy. The enforcement of lockdown rules continues to be a responsibility of securocrats who bears an ugly history of human rights violations in the country.

Health delivery system militarization

The country's health delivery system has been plunged into a serious crisis owing to bad governance that has characterise the country for more than 3 decades now. The outbreak of COVID-19 has made worse the crisis as evidenced by reported cases of

corruption in the health sector. On 3 August, President Mnangagwa appointed a serving member of the military, Air Commode Jasper Chimedza as permanent secretary of the health ministry. The following day saw the appointment of VP Chiwenga, a retired commander of the country's defense forces, as the minister of health.

The appointment of the above two military men to lead the health ministry amid a non-stop industrial action by health workers is apparently an attempt to steer the health delivery system ship by coercion in light of VP Chiwenga's history of dealing with health workers in public health institutions. In 2018, VP Chiwenga instructed the Health Services Board (HSB) to dismiss all striking nurses and replace them with unemployed trained nurses¹. The nurses had embarked on an industrial action due to poor working conditions and low remuneration and for them to be dismissed was an act of injustice. Against this background coupled with the history of military men in government projects and programmes, the country's health delivery system will continue facing challenges to navigate through lack of transparency, bad governance, lack of accountability and generally poor performance.

The involvement of the military faces in the health delivery system at a time when the country is in a deep public health crisis is detrimental to investor confidence in this particular sector. The military men cannot be trusted with democratic norms such as transparency, accountability and partiality and the ultimate realization of socio-economic rights by citizens.

The public health facilities, more than five months after the outbreak of COVID-19, still lack adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for frontline health workers. Recently, senior resident medical professionals at Parirenyatwa Hospitals stopped reporting for duty² owing to their members testing positive for COVID-19 as a result of shortage of PPE.

¹Chronicles. (2018). Striking Nurses Fired. . . Vp Chiwenga says protest politically motivated. Available at: <https://www.chronicle.co.zw/striking-nurses-fired-vp-chiwenga-says-protest-politically-motivated/>

² NewZimbabwe.Com (Online). 2020. Available at: <https://www.newzimbabwe.com/parirenyatwa-specialist-doctors-down-tools-citing-covid-19-fears/>

Zimbabwe's political & economic crisis: The State in denial

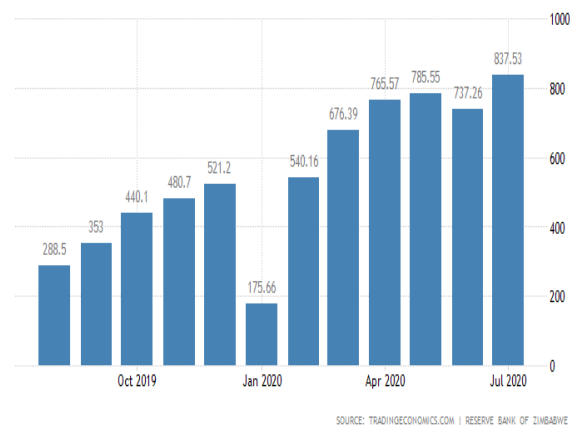
The country's leadership is struggling to decisively deal with political and economic challenges that have impacted heavily on ordinary citizens. In contrast, President Mnangagwa's government has continued on a path of power consolidation as democratic transition post-Robert Mugabe era remains a dream. The country is stuck in a longstanding crisis as indicated by declining livelihoods, continued devaluation of local currency (ZWL) and the ever-deteriorating rule of law and human rights environment.

The government has, of late, descended heavily on journalists, lawyers, opposition members and activists in an unprecedented crackdown on dissenting voices. The current crisis obtaining in the country has invited wide condemnation of disturbing human rights violations and disrespect of rule of law as the military and police continue to be unleashed to citizens under the guise of enforcing COVID-19 lockdown rules. Amid all these latest developments in the country, the President Mnangagwa-led government continues to be adamant that the country is not in a crisis.

Hyperinflation: Deep economic meltdown indicator

Zimbabwe's political crisis has given rise to a stagnant economy characterized by high levels of poverty and hyperinflationary environment. The country's year-on-year inflation rate for July 2020 according to the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency currently stands at 837.53%, with month-on-month inflation standing at 35.53% up from 31.66%.³ This hyperinflationary environment has pushed up the prices of basic commodities beyond the reach of many people who, for instance civil servants are getting salaries that are below poverty datum line. The economic meltdown is highly likely to recur as projected by the United Nations' World Food Programme that 60% of the people of Zimbabwe will

suffer from food insecurity by the end of 2020.⁴ Below is the diagram showing inflation rates.



Source: Tradingeconomics.com - Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe

Rule of law & justice delivery system: Weaponisation of the law?

The continued incarceration of journalist Hopewell Chin'ono and opposition leader Jacob Ngarivhume without conviction point to a case whereby the law in Zimbabwe has been weaponised against dissenting voices. 21 August marked exactly a month since the arrest of Hopewell Chin'ono at his place of residence by heavily armed police. To date, the journalist has not been convicted of any crime but languishes at the country's largest prison and correctional facility, Chikurubi Maximum Prison. There's total disregard of the constitutional rights of detained persons as Chin'ono and Ngarivhume are persistently denied access to food and warm clothing in addition to being chained.

It is absurd for any justice delivery system in a constitutional democracy to put arrested people in chains and leg irons before or when being tried by a competent court. In the case of Chin'ono and Ngarivhume, it appears the law is used as a weapon against anyone who highlights challenges that the country is facing and recommends the way forward.

³ Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency – ZIMSTAT. Available at: <https://twitter.com/zimstat?s=20>

⁴ United Nations World Food Programme. Zimbabwe. Available at: <https://www.wfp.org/countries/zimbabwe>



MDC Deputy National Chairman's lawyer Jeremiah Bamu in police vehicle after he was arrested for getting access to Magistrate Court premises in Harare. In one case of several arrests of opposition members, Sikhala was arrested on 21 August and charged with incitement of violence

Zimbabwean crisis and local reaction

The continued human rights violations and economic mismanagement in the country have always been discussion topic among various local institutions particularly the civil society. Of late, the worsening crisis has attracted the attention of the church whereby the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC) on 14 August issued a statement in support of an online campaign for a democratic transition in Zimbabwe, #ZimbabweanLivesMatter. The Catholic bishops explicitly highlighted the country's multi-layered crisis characterized by economic decay, abject poverty, widespread corruption, human rights violations, food insecurity and others which warrant immediate resolution.⁵

The ZCBC, regardless of State's vilification and attacks, has received widespread solidarity from other church bodies such as the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) and the Southern African Catholic Bishops.

Regional and international reaction to Zimbabwean crisis

The ever-growing political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe is increasingly becoming an issue of deep

⁵The Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference. The March Is Not Ended: Pastoral Letter of the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference On the Current Situation in Zimbabwe.

concern around the African continent. The African Union Commission (AUC) on 7 August urged the government, in its fight against COVID-19, to be mindful of rule of law and human rights protection in line with African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights of 1981⁶ as it fights COVID-19. The AUC's remarks came against a background of President Mnangagwa's use of the military which uses its force disproportionately to enforce COVID-19 lockdown rules.

The President of South Africa Cyril Ramaphosa on 10 August dispatched his three-member delegation to Zimbabwe following the arrests and harassment of government critics in a continued state crackdown against dissent. The move by President Ramaphosa is a clear indication that South Africa acknowledges the fact that Zimbabwe is in a crisis regardless of the dismissal of such by the Zimbabwean authorities. However, the failure by this envoy to meet the opposition and civil society questions the sincerity of President Ramaphosa to help solve the Zimbabwean Crisis.



Dr Sydney Mufamadi, head of South African envoys to Zimbabwe, addressing the media after his meeting with President Mnangagwa at State House in Harare

In another acknowledgement of the crisis in Zimbabwe, South Africa's Minister of International Relations Naledi Pandor reminded President Mnangagwa's government that Zimbabwe faces a political problem and it is an undeniable fact and as

⁶ African Union. AUC Chairperson urges authorities in Zimbabwe to uphold the rule of law and protect human rights. Available at: <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20200807/auc-chairperson-urges-authorities-zimbabwe-uphold-rule-law-and-protect-human>

such the people of Zimbabwe have to find a solution to it.⁷

The human rights abuses and disregard of rule of law constituting the Zimbabwean crisis have also attracted the attention of the United Nations (UN). The Secretary General of UN, Antonio Guterres expressed deep concern on the human rights situation that currently obtains in the country and urged the government of Zimbabwe to respect and promote human rights in line with its human rights obligations.⁸

Conclusion

The country's crisis continues to deepen unabated regardless of dismissal of such by the government. Human rights violations are evident as indicated by the continued incarceration of journalist Hopewell Chin'ono, TZ leader Jacob Ngarivhume; harassment of lawyers representing arrested government critics. The human rights crisis is compounded by the economic rot as inflation continues to rise steeply coupled with acute devaluation of the local currency against the United State Dollar (US\$).

Recommendations

Cognizant of the continued human rights, political and socio-economic crisis bedeviling Zimbabwe, the ZDI in line with its aim to advance democracy, development, good governance and human rights in Zimbabwe, recommends the following;

- ✓ The government of Zimbabwe must immediately accept an externally-mediated national dialogue involving the military with an objective of solving the deepening crisis that the country is engulfed in. The dialogue must prioritize the urgent need to accomplish the much needed economic and political reforms before 2023 elections. These

reforms are a critical component in ensuring the conduct of credible elections without the subsequent creation of legitimacy crisis as was the case of 2018.

- ✓ The government of Zimbabwe, without delay, must stop the politicization of the judiciary to clampdown on dissent including opposition members, lawyers, journalists and activists.
- ✓ The government of Zimbabwe must put into practice the African Charter On Human and Peoples' Rights through promoting and respecting peoples' liberties and investigate all reports of state-sponsored violence against opposition members.

⁷ ZimLive (2020). Zimbabwe must accept help, crisis impacting us: SA foreign minister. Available at: <https://www.zimlive.com/2020/08/14/zimbabwe-must-accept-help-crisis-impacting-us-sa-foreign-minister/>

⁸ Eye Witness. (2020). UN'S Guterres Urges Govt In Troubled Zimbabwe To Uphold Human Rights. Available at: <https://ewn.co.za/2020/08/06/the-un-s-guterres-urges-the-govt-in-troubled-zimbabwe-uphold-human-rights>