

ZIMBABWE FACTS

Full name: Republic of Zimbabwe

Population: 12.5 million (2009)

Capital: Harare

Major language: English (official), Shona, Sindebele

Ethnic Groups: African 98% (Shona 82%, Ndebele 14%, other 2%), mixed and Asian 1%, white less than 1%

Major religions: Christianity, indigenous beliefs, Muslim

Main exports: Tobacco, cotton, agricultural products, gold, minerals

Head of state: Executive President Robert Gabriel Mugabe (since 1987); Vice-President Joyce Mujuru (since December 2004)

Head of government: Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai (since February 2009); Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara

Government type: parliamentary democracy

Main political parties: Movement for Democratic Change or MDC (Morgan Tsvangirai); Movement for Democratic Change - Mutambara or MDC-M (splinter faction under Arthur Mutambara); Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front or ZANU-PF (Robert Mugabe)

Commander in chief of the armed forces: Constantine Chiwenga (Mugabe loyalist)

Judiciary: Although it used be one of the most effective and trusted judiciary in Africa, there has been increasing pressure on the judges. It seems that only pro-Mugabe judges are chosen and the judiciary has become extremely corrupt.

Key ministries:

- Zanu-PF: Joseph Made (Agriculture, mechanisation & irrigation); Emmerson Mnangagwa (Defence); Simbarashe Mumbengegwi (Foreign Affairs); Patrick Chinamasa (Justice and legal affairs); Herbert Murerwa (Lands & rural resettlement); Webster Shamu (Media, information & publicity); Obert Mpofu (Mines & minerals development); Francis Nhema (Environment & natural resources management).

- MDC: Tendai Biti (Finance); Elton Mangoma (Economic planning & investment promotion); Elias Mudzuri (Energy & power development); Henry Madzorera (Health and child welfare); Welshman Ncube (Industry and commerce); Giles Mutsekwa (Home Affairs); Paurina Gwanyanya (Labour and social security); David Coltart (Education, sport, art & culture).

History

Zimbabwe is a former British colony, formerly known as Rhodesia. The former Rhodesia has a history of conflict, with white settlers dispossessing the resident population. The UK refused to recognize independence until UN sanctions and guerrilla uprising finally led to free elections in 1979 and independence in 1980. Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front - ZANU-PF) was elected as the nation's first prime minister and then President has been the country's only ruler ever since. Mugabe suppressed all forms of opposition and organized a chaotic compulsory land redistribution campaign in 2000 which caused an exodus of white farmers and crippled the economy, creating widespread shortages of basic commodities. In 2002, he rigged the presidential elections, ensuring his re-election. In 2005, ZANU-PF party used intimidation to win a two-thirds majority in the parliamentary election. Economic mismanagement, hyperinflation and corruption led to widespread poverty, further food shortages

and public health problems. Human rights abuses are also widespread. The government embarked on Operation Restore Order in 2005, drawing international condemnation. President Mugabe argued it was an effort to boost law, order and development but critics accused him of destroying slums housing opposition supporters. Approximately, 700,000 people were left without homes or jobs.

MDC opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai (Movement for Democratic Change) probably won the March 2008 presidential elections but official results posted by the Zimbabwe Electoral Committee did not reflect this and results were withheld for weeks. In the lead up to a run-off election in late June 2008, considerable violence against opposition party members led to the withdrawal of Tsvangirai from the ballot. Extensive evidence of electoral fraud ultimately resulted in international condemnation of the process. In February 2009, after difficult negotiations over a power-sharing agreement, Tsvangirai became Prime Minister while Mugabe remains President. The two parties continue to negotiate but areas contention remain, particularly concerning economic ministries, the economy and the constitution-making process.

Media

Press: The Herald (government-owned daily), The Chronicle (government-owned daily), The Financial Gazette (private, business weekly), The Standard (private, weekly), The Zimbabwe Independent (private, weekly)

Television: Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC)

Radio: ZBC (state-run), SW Africa (based in London), Voice of the People (broadcasted to Zimbabwe from Madagascar), Studio 7 (based in Washington DC, operated by Voice of America).

The press is dominated by two pro-government daily newspapers: the Harare-based *Herald* and the Bulawayo-based *Chronicle*. Both are tightly controlled by the Information Ministry. State-run Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) operates the country's only TV and radio stations, there are not private radio stations. Because newspapers are expensive, radio is the main source of information for many Zimbabweans. However, Zimbabwe is also targeted by overseas-based radio, including *Voice of the People* (broadcasts to Zimbabwe from Madagascar), *SW Africa* and *Studio 7*. They aim at giving “biased information.”

Private newspapers, which tend to be highly critical of the government, have come under severe pressure. *The Daily News* was banned after a legal battle. The two main remaining weeklies are *The Standard* and *The Zimbabwe Independent*. Another weekly, *The Zimbabwean*, is produced in London and distributed in Zimbabwe as an international publication.

Publishing false news is an offense in Zimbabwe and can lead to prison sentences. Journalists who fail to register with a government body also risk imprisonment.

Webster-Shamu (Zanu-PF) is currently serving as Minister of Media, Publicity and Information under the Zanu-PF—MDC national unity government.

Human Rights profile

- **Blood Diamonds**

One of the main human rights problems is the issue of blood diamonds. The discovery of diamonds in the east of the country in June 2006 led to widespread violence against civilians by the police and the army who want access to the gems. Not only did the government (then completely controlled by Zanu-PF) refuse to intervene but Zanu-PF officials are believed to be involved, especially as the party strives to control the country's revenues and relies upon a patronage system in order to retain the loyalty of the army and keep Mugabe in power. Zanu-PF shot down allegations that human rights abuses were taking place on the ground.

In 2009, *Human Rights Watch* published a 62-page report on the situation in the Marange province. The report features interviews with police officers, victims, community leaders, medical staff, miners and witnesses. Killings, rape, torture and beatings have taken place.

“Diamonds in the Rough: Human Rights Abuses in the Marange Diamond Fields of Zimbabwe”

<http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2009/06/26/diamonds-rough-0>

- **State-orchestrated Torture of Political Opponents**

On-going abuses by Zanu-PF, police and intelligence officials of political opponents and civil society activists, particularly in rural areas, are another main human rights problem. Widespread terror took place both before and after the 2008 parliamentary and presidential elections in an attempt to intimidate voters. Indeed MDC supporters were systematically arrested, killed, beaten and harassed, and although the government is now based on a power-sharing agreement, there have reports that torture and harassment of political opponents are still taking place. Secret torture training camps where youths are taught how to kill and torture have also been established. Prime Minister Tsvangirai himself was arrested in 2007 after a rally and heavily beaten.

A *Human Rights Watch* reports published in 2008 can be read here:

“They beat me like a dog”

<http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2008/08/11/they-beat-me-dog-0>

“Bullets for each of you: state-sponsored violence since Zimbabwe's March 29 elections”

<http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2008/06/09/bullets-each-you>

“You will be thoroughly beaten: the brutal repression of dissent in Zimbabwe”

<http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2006/10/31/you-will-be-thoroughly-beaten-0>

In early March 2010, Prime Minister Tsvangirai launched a torture report exposing state sponsored violence. “Cries from Goromonzi - Inside *Zimbabwe's Torture Chambers*,” featuring several interviews with victims, was commissioned by Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition. The report cannot be found online yet.

- **Forced Evictions and the Land Reform Programme**

Farm invasions and mass evictions from farms and townships have been taken place almost since Mugabe since 1979, threatening the livelihood of thousands of people. An example of mass eviction is President Robert Mugabe's 2005 Operation Murambatsvina (“Drive out the rubbish”) campaign when were homes and property were destroyed by police and security forces. The reason behind evictions seems to be retribution against those who voted for the MDC, particularly urban poor. *Amnesty International* has condemned forced evictions.

Amnesty International, 22 July 2009

“Fear of more mass evictions in Harare”

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR46/021/2009>

The “land question” was a central point during the revolution that led to Zimbabwe’s independence. Farm invasions and land redistribution truly began in 2000 and aimed to redress historical land imbalance and redistribute land to black people. Indeed, during colonialism, the white minority owned 70% of the land. Commercial white farmers have also seen their land taken away from them. However, most of the land landed in the hands of black elites and remained unavailable to most lower-class Zimbabweans. Moreover, the seizure of commercial farms not only affects the owner but also Zimbabwe’s farm worker population. After independence, Zimbabwe had a thriving agricultural sector yet instead of empowering black people, the land redistribution programme has had grave economic consequences, leading to unemployment, poverty and famine. Farmers have been asking for compensation but the government has failed to do so. Violence by Zanu-PF youth militia against farm workers has also been reported. The land reform programme is still extremely controversial today.