

7. Accelerating Toward Catastrophe: Since 2001

The tail end of 2001 and the beginning of 2002 were dominated by manoeuvres surrounding the presidential campaign. Repeated attempts to negotiate an international settlement that would defuse the land problem did not change the government's course. As the fast track program continued unabated, the consequences became more and more painful for average Zimbabweans. This came at a time when a rapidly decaying health system was struggling to deal with the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The food crisis and evictions of thousands of farm workers exacerbated the high unemployment in an environment of violence, intimidation and abuse of human rights. Meanwhile, thousands of farms and millions of hectares of productive land – with the best doled out to the ZANU-PF elite – lie idle.

A. ABUJA

A September 2001 conference of Commonwealth Foreign Ministers in Abuja, Nigeria seemed to offer both Zimbabwe and the UK a last opportunity to agree over the funding of the land program. Zimbabwe's foreign minister, Stan Mudenge, pledged that his government would end farm invasions and violence on occupied farms, restore the rule of law and abide by earlier land agreements while undertaking reform in a gradual, fair and transparent manner.²⁵⁸ Commonwealth Secretary General Don McKinnon called the commitment from Zimbabwean representatives "very strong".²⁵⁹ In response, the British government agreed to make substantial funds available to compensate displaced farmers and finance infrastructure in the resettled areas.²⁶⁰ However, President Mugabe himself did not take part in the talks, and the effort to reach an agreement seemed to stem

²⁵⁸ In 1995, the Commonwealth countries approved the Millbrook Action program in order to put into practice the principles adopted in the Harare Declaration concerning the promotion and protection of democracy and human rights. An action group composed of ministers of foreign affairs was set up as a mechanism for dealing with and coordinating collective responses to serious and persistent violations of these principles.

²⁵⁹ *The Independent* (London), 7 September 2001.

²⁶⁰ *The Guardian* (London), 7 September 2001.

largely from a desire to avoid condemnation of Zimbabwe at the forthcoming Brisbane Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.²⁶¹

The short-lived Abuja agreement tied the question of land to governance, provided a new standard by which to judge Zimbabwe's good faith and promised farm workers 20 per cent of redistributed land. However, it failed to spell out conditions for restoring the rule of law and holding free and fair elections. It appeared to condone previous farm invasions and occupations, provided that such lands were listed for redistribution.²⁶² It also failed to address one of main forces driving the crisis: sponsorship of violence and lawlessness by the ZANU-PF in an effort to ensure its electoral victory.²⁶³ The agreement allowed for "fair" land reform "within the law and constitution of Zimbabwe", without taking into account that most laws (and indeed the judiciary itself) were being explicitly tailored by the government to accommodate wholesale land seizures.

In retrospect, Mugabe was largely buying time with the Abuja agreement, which largely dissipated calls to have Zimbabwe suspended from the Commonwealth at the Brisbane meeting. Mugabe used negotiations on land policy as his most effective means to delay international sanctions. He understood that the mere promise of reform was often enough to divide the international community.²⁶⁴

B. THE ELECTION

With the presidential election imminent and Abuja offering a glimmer of promise, donors tried to move President Mugabe toward a more conciliatory position. In December 2001, the U.S. offered \$26 million – \$20 million for land reform and \$6 million for a democratic transition, debt relief and economic reforms – if the conditions in its Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act were met.

In January 2002, Mugabe announced that the presidential election would be held on 9-10 March. By then, the elected parliamentary seats were evenly divided between the MDC and ZANU-PF because the courts had overturned a number of the latter's victories. If Tsvangirai won the presidency, he would be able to name the 30 non-constituency

²⁶¹ The Brisbane meeting was scheduled for 6-9 October 2001 but was moved to 2-5 March 2002 after the 11 September 2001 terror attacks in the U.S.

²⁶² The agreement stated that invaders were to be moved off farms that were not officially designated for seizures. As the government had listed 90 per cent of the farms for seizure, this did not leave many from which current occupiers were to be moved.

²⁶³ See, for example, an article in the *Daily News*, 7 September 2001, that describes police involvement in the looting of commercial farms in the Mhangura area.

²⁶⁴ See ICG Report, *All Bark and No Bite: The International Response to Zimbabwe's Crisis*, op. cit.

parliamentarians, giving the MDC a wide majority, but Mugabe and ZANU-PF were determined to retain that office. By January, inflation had hit 100 per cent, and the government introduced new laws that served to limit press freedom, ban strikes that were held without permission, prohibit the public expression of hostility toward President Mugabe and gave the security services sweeping new powers. The military sent public signals that it might not recognise a MDC victory. Additionally, throughout the previous year, the government had formed youth brigades, effectively giving ZANU-PF a young militia to serve as a more malleable alternative to the war veterans.

On 13 February, a video of Tsvangirai allegedly plotting against President Mugabe appeared on Australian television that resulted in a second charge of treason. The opposition leader was shown meeting with Ari Ben-Manashe, a former member of Israeli intelligence who headed a Canadian lobbying firm, Dickens and Madson, which eventually secured a large contract with the government of Zimbabwe. Ben-Manashe insisted that Tsvangirai was intent on assassinating Mugabe, although the tape seemed to indicate an active attempt to lure him into making or acknowledging incriminating statements.

In the run-up to the ballot, the EU and the government engaged in an escalating war of words about elections, the nationality of election monitors and the latitude with which monitors could operate.²⁶⁵ In February the EU withdrew its observers, and in mid-month the EU and U.S. imposed sanctions that limited the travel and froze the assets of some senior officials.²⁶⁶ However, these sanctions have not been strictly enforced, and

²⁶⁵ Zimbabwe demanded that observers from the UK, Sweden, Germany, Finland, Denmark and the Netherlands not participate because they were "hostile".

²⁶⁶ On 18 February 2002, the EU imposed a one-year travel ban and froze the assets of President Mugabe and nineteen close associates. The sale of arms and the provision of arms-related expertise to Zimbabwe were also prohibited during this period. The sanctions were a direct response to the ejection of the head of the EU election observer mission, Pierre Schori, three days earlier. In mid-February 2003, France accepted renewal of the EU sanctions for an additional year after it was agreed that President Mugabe would be permitted to attend the Franco-African summit in Paris. By September 2002, the names of those on the sanctions list had grown to 79. On 22 February 2002, the U.S. imposed a travel ban on Mugabe and nineteen associates and froze their assets. Like the EU, the U.S. also prohibited the sale of arms and weapons technology to Zimbabwe, although these measures took considerable time to put in place. On 6 March 2003, the U.S. extended the asset freeze and travel ban to 76 individuals. Unlike the EU sanctions, the U.S. sanctions carry no end-date and will stay in place until they are specifically lifted. In April 2003, the U.S. government released a list of companies that have been fined for violating the sanctions against Zimbabwe and nine other countries, including Citibank, Caterpillar, Bank of New York and others to a total of \$1.1 million. The U.S. sanctions list from March 2003 can be found at

senior ZANU-PF officials have been able to circumvent many of these restrictions. A senior U.S. official acknowledged that the U.S. Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control has been preoccupied by the terrorism issue and has not dedicated significant staff time to Zimbabwe.²⁶⁷ The absence of measures regarding spouses and closest business associates of senior government officials is a considerable loophole in both U.S. and EU sanctions.

At the Brisbane summit, from 2-5 March 2002 and one week before Zimbabwe voted, African leaders refused to suspend it from the Commonwealth, arguing that the step would dim hopes for a free election. But ZANU-PF had already engaged in a widespread campaign of violence and intimidation in the run-up to the election. There were 24 political murders, almost all of MDC supporters, in February alone. As noted, the government tinkered with citizenship laws to make large numbers of farm workers ineligible to vote. Citizens living abroad were also largely prevented from voting. The government minimised the number of polling stations in areas of MDC strength thus creating long lines in many urban areas and essentially disenfranchising large numbers who could not reach the ballot box because of the wait. Commentators described this as "slow motion" electoral theft. Although the courts ordered that polling stations be kept open for an additional day, the government responded unevenly.

President Mugabe was declared to have received 1.6 million votes to the 1.2 million for Tsvangirai. Given the systematic abuses, the election could not be considered either free or fair. However, a number of African observers took a tolerant approach. An observer team from the Organisation of African Unity concluded, "In general, the elections were transparent, credible, free and fair". A Namibian observer went so far as to call the election "watertight", and President Moi of Kenya said to Mugabe that the election was "testimony of the confidence and high esteem the people of Zimbabwe hold in you".²⁶⁸ In contrast, Desmond Tutu maintained, "I am

www.ustreas.gov/offices/eotffc/ofac/sanctions/t11zimb.pdf. A list of companies violating the sanctions can be found at www.treas.gov/offices/eotffc/ofac/civpen/penalties/2003.html. See also Jason Tulk, "Crisis and Coercion: The Political Economy of Sanctioning Zimbabwe", unpublished paper, September 2003, made available to ICG. In early March 2004, the U.S. government designated seven additional businesses owned or controlled by key government figures for sanctions. These included commercial farms seized by Information Minister Jonathan Moyo; Zimbabwe Defence Industries, a government owned arms manufacturer; M&S Syndicate, a holding company owned by ZANU-PF; and two companies representing the interests of retired Defence Forces General Vitalis Zvinavashe. U.S. State Department, Press Statement by spokesman Richard Boucher, Washington, D.C., 2 March 2004.

²⁶⁷ ICG interview.

²⁶⁸ "Zimbabwe Election Chronology", *Congressional Research Service*, 26 March 2002.

deeply, deeply distressed and deeply disappointed that our country could be among those who say the election was legitimate or free".²⁶⁹ The Commonwealth found the election severely problematic, with high levels of violence and intimidation, a flawed legislative framework, widespread repression of expression and thousands disenfranchised.

Tsvangirai thanked the people of Zimbabwe, appealed for calm and stated, "Rarely in the history of mankind have people faced such brutality while retaining gracious exuberance".²⁷⁰ After being sworn in, President Mugabe declared, "The land reform program must proceed with greater speed and strength".²⁷¹ Presidents Mbeki of South Africa and Obasanjo of Nigeria travelled to Zimbabwe to encourage Mugabe and Tsvangirai to form a government of national unity. South Africa and Nigeria were under growing pressure from the U.S. and the UK to bring Mugabe around, but their proposal never got off the ground, with Mugabe apparently willing to consider giving the MDC only a very junior role.

On 19 March 2002, a spokesman noted that U.S. President George W. Bush was disappointed that some African heads of state were "willing to turn a blind eye to what happens in Zimbabwe".²⁷² That same day Prime Minister John Howard of Australia, Mbeki and Obasanjo, heading the three-nation task force the Commonwealth charged with looking into the situation, announced Zimbabwe's suspension for twelve months. In what seemed to be a direct reaction, Tsvangirai was ordered to appear at police headquarters and surrender his passport as the second treason count was lodged.

In July 2002, a select committee of the British Parliament reflected on the collapse of the Abuja accord:

We accept that the efforts of successive British Governments did not produce an outcome which was agreeable to Mr. Mugabe, but this does not in any way excuse the illegal campaign of violence, intimidation and forcible seizures of land orchestrated by ZANU-PF. In any case, Mr Mugabe was offered a good deal at Abuja, which at the time he appeared to accept – if only to buy time – but which he later rejected. The prime responsibility for the crisis in Zimbabwe is his.²⁷³

²⁶⁹ *The Daily Telegraph*, (London), 25 March 2002.

²⁷⁰ Chan, *Robert Mugabe*, op. cit., p. 204

²⁷¹ *The Daily Telegraph* (London), 18 March 2002.

²⁷² "Zimbabwe Election Chronology", *Congressional Research Service*, 26 March 2002.

²⁷³ Extract from UK Parliament Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, Tenth Report, 31 July 2002.

By way of reply, President Mugabe declared at the September 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, "We have not asked for any inch of Europe, not any square inch of that territory. So, Blair, you keep England, and let me keep my Zimbabwe".²⁷⁴

Also in September, Commonwealth Secretary General McKinnon listed five minimum conditions for Zimbabwe's readmission: overturning legislation that limits freedom of speech and the press; ending harassment of civil society and political opposition; reforming the electoral system; working with the Commonwealth and the UN on land policy; and initiating negotiations with the MDC as part of an effort toward national reconciliation. Mugabe's African support was starting to fray. The leaders of Botswana, Ghana and Kenya publicly criticised him, and behind closed doors there was apparent erosion among some long-time backers. Nevertheless, September municipal and district elections were marred by heavy intimidation, with half the 1,400 MDC candidates physically prevented from registering.²⁷⁵ Making matters worse, hunger seemed to be one of the most immediate products of the fast track program.

C. THE FOOD CRISIS

As early as August 2001, the World Food Programme (WFP) paced Zimbabwe under the status of an "exceptional food emergency" and begun formulating plans to deal with looming shortages. Maize production had already been cut almost 30 per cent below the 2000 level, and drought had the potential to make the situation worse. The decline in GDP, an unemployment rate between 60 and 80 per cent and crippling inflation combined with reduced food production created severe food insecurity across most of the country. A food security expert in Zimbabwe observed that, "Seed and fertiliser are just unaffordable....People with nothing have been put on farms and they have to sell off the assets".²⁷⁶ The government steadfastly ignored the growing indicators of hunger and constructed roadblock after roadblock to the delivery of food assistance to the needy.

In November 2001 the WFP announced plans to begin large-scale food deliveries, even as the government made it illegal for more than 1,000 farmers to tend their fields and gave them three months to leave their properties. Banning farming at a time of increasingly serious shortages may have made electoral sense but was dangerous public policy. In December, the government demanded that farmers deliver all their maize and wheat to

²⁷⁴ Bond and Manyanya, *Zimbabwe's Plunge*, op. cit., p. 275.

²⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 270.

²⁷⁶ ICG interview, 5 December 2003.

its Grain Marketing Board within two weeks. This further disrupted normal activities, making it difficult to feed livestock without breaking the law.

In March 2002 the WFP indicated that more than half a million Zimbabweans needed food aid. The reaction from the Grain Marketing Board director, Justine Mutasa, suggested remarkable denial: "There is so much maize in the country, and we may not even need to import if we manage to impound all the maize from commercial farmers".²⁷⁷ However, the number of those needing food continued to rise sharply, as did concerns the government was manipulating food aid to its political ends.

In 2002, WFP Director James Morris and other UN officials requested that Mugabe lift the state monopoly on importing grain so the UN could create an \$85 million fund designed to allow private companies to borrow money and import more than 400,000 tons of grain. Morris also requested that food relief be channelled to the cities and former commercial farm workers and their families displaced by the land seizures. Yet, Mugabe continued to resist the free import of food. In fact, the government implemented additional restrictions to prevent donors from delivering aid²⁷⁸ and confiscated maize that the opposition attempted to import for relief purposes. It permitted the marketing board to sell the maize in February 2003, although it appeared also to resume stockpiling food.

Due to the growing urgency of the humanitarian crisis, the WFP's Morris visited in late January 2003 as a special envoy of Kofi Annan. In unusually blunt language, he blamed the government for the escalating food shortage, which he called "almost beyond comprehension".²⁷⁹ Morris argued that the situation could have been avoided, and the fast track resettlements "along with restrictions on private sector food marketing and a monopoly on food imports...are turning a drought that might have been managed into a humanitarian nightmare". He urged the government to reverse policies hampering the delivery of food aid and pressed Mugabe to scrap the state monopoly on importation of maize and wheat.²⁸⁰ Under that monopoly, only the Grain Marketing Board can import "strategic" grains, while the private sector is prevented from importing any of these staple grains, giving the state nearly full control over the food supply. A food security expert insisted that the Grain Marketing Board is "actually making the situation worse. They are centralising the distribution of agricultural inputs, and with millions of people needing inputs, some people are getting

²⁷⁷ *The Guardian* (London), 22 January 2002.

²⁷⁸ Government restrictions prevented the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development from delivering tons of maize. ICG interview with Catholic Archbishop of Bulawayo, Pius Ncube, 2003.

²⁷⁹ BBC, 26 February 2003.

²⁸⁰ "UN envoy to meet Mugabe, Tsvangirai", *The Financial Gazette*, 23-29 January 2003.

fertiliser and seed after the planting season is done. We can't all be farmers. Let the people who can farm, farm".²⁸¹ Instead, the Grain Marketing Board – which appears to be an important source of revenue for ZANU-PF party loyalists – has been given greater and greater power, despite a track record of almost complete failure in its critical operations.

Production of maize, wheat, soy and tobacco plummeted, often to levels that were a third of previous production. Agriculture, long the core of the economy, once contributed 40 per cent of the country's foreign exchange and 30 per cent of its annual production. With the impact of land seizures and wholesale displacement compounded by drought, some seven million Zimbabweans were facing famine in January 2003.²⁸² Food shortages and price distortions might also have encouraged individuals both to use seed for food and export it to Zambia. It was expected that less than half the soybean requirement would be met, causing a further downturn in intensive animal production systems. The 2002 wheat harvest was 160,000 to 170,000 tons, well below the 300,000 ton average. Less than 10 per cent of arable land was producing some sort of grain. The commercial beef herd had declined from 1.2 million to less than 150,000, with foot-and-mouth disease also a serious problem, little money available for vaccines and increasing disruptions in the cold chain.²⁸³

Farm disruptions caused by land seizures reduced the 2002 tobacco crop to about 162,000 tons, down 40,000 tons from 2001. The sharp reduction of tobacco output further devastated the already reeling economy. Tobacco has traditionally produced over 30 per cent of foreign exchange earnings, and the industry is the country's largest employer. With fertilizer in short supply and the overall cost of production rocketing, banks were reluctant to lend to farmers due to the pervasive environment of risk.²⁸⁴ The impact of the political and economic chaos on tourism revenues was equally disastrous. A senior Western diplomat observed, "There will be a food deficit in this country for years to come....There is not much point in providing a lot of aid to farmers at this point and pretending that we can improve food production in the face of so many counter-productive government policies".²⁸⁵

There is ample evidence that the Grain Marketing Board has channelled scarce food to ZANU-PF supporters while denying it to

²⁸¹ ICG interview, Harare, 6 December 2003.

²⁸² Fergal Keane, "Famine plagues Zimbabwe", BBC News World Edition, 21 January 2003.

²⁸³ Agri-SA, press conference statement, 31 January 2003.

²⁸⁴ "Zimbabwe tobacco crop to halve", BBC Business News, 24 October 2002. Agri-SA in February 2003 estimated that it would drop to 35 per cent of the previous year's crop.

²⁸⁵ ICG interview, Harare, 8 December 2003.

suspected opposition supporters.²⁸⁶ There are widespread and credible accusations that the government has required food recipients to have a ZANU-PF party card. A food security expert comments, "Food aid is politicised all over the country", and MDC supporters have literally been cut off from government supplies.²⁸⁷

The WFP noted at the end of 2003: "The supply of maize available through the government's Grain Marketing Board is erratic and scarce. The price of maize on the parallel market has risen by more than 200 per cent over the last year. ... Government price controls have caused or exacerbated urban shortages of staple foods, such as maize and wheat".²⁸⁸ In January 2004, it again asked the government to release more than 200,000 tons of maize from stocks.²⁸⁹ With more than 7 million short of food, and donors more and more reluctant to deliver assistance given other pressing humanitarian crises around the globe, the government's refusal to feed its own people was all the more damning.

In 2004, the food situation took another dangerous turn. In a continuing effort to use hunger as a political weapon, the government again began insisting that there was no food shortage in the country. In early May, Zimbabwe ejected a UN food assessment team from the country, and Agriculture Minister Joseph Made issued a series of wildly optimistic, and obviously false, crop estimates. Crediting the "success" of land redistribution, Minister Made claimed that Zimbabwe's maize production would double to more than 2.5 million tons, several times what was produced in either 2002 or 2003. Most outside observers view these claims as a physical impossibility given the many redistributed farms that continue to lay fallow. President Mugabe, in a rare interview with a British journalist, insisted that Zimbabwe would not accept international food aid in the coming year. "Why foist this food upon us?" said Mugabe, "We don't want to be choked. We have enough".²⁹⁰ Mugabe suggested food should "go to hungrier people, hungrier countries than ourselves".

While there have been marginal improvements in harvests, the UN estimated by mid-2004 that more than 5 million Zimbabweans still required food aid, with almost half of the neediest being in urban areas (a traditional hotbed of MDC support). Clearly, President Mugabe and ZANU-PF have

²⁸⁶ ICG interviews with food aid recipients in Seke, Rusape, Hwedza, Matobo, Nkayi, Binga, 2003. ICG interviews with World Food Program, Save the Children (UK) and World Vision, 2003. See also ICG Report, *Zimbabwe: The Politics of National Liberation And International Division*, op. cit.

²⁸⁷ ICG interview, Harare, 6 December 2003.

²⁸⁸ WFP, Zimbabwe country information. Available at www.wfp.org/country_brief/index.asp?region=3.

²⁸⁹ *The New York Times*, 23 January 2004.

²⁹⁰ *The Times* (London), 24 May 2004.

determined that they can and will use food as a blunt instrument of their political strength in the run-up to parliamentary elections tentatively scheduled for March 2005. Elections may well be moved up to late 2004 as the government attempts to secure more parliamentary seats before the crisis grows even more severe. There were also indications that the government was attempting to circumvent international sanctions to trade tobacco and minerals with international companies in order to secure imports of maize and wheat.²⁹¹ By maintaining a monopoly over food distribution, ZANU-PF hopes that the hungry will make docile political opponents. James Morris of the WFP noted in June 2004 that the combination of AIDS, food shortages and poverty had left southern Africa as "the most serious humanitarian crisis in the world today" with Zimbabwe at its epicentre.²⁹²

D. THE STATE OF FARMING AND LAND REDISTRIBUTION

By January 2002, as President Mugabe moved to secure his re-election, even institutions prepared to be more patient with the government, such as the UNDP, were warning of the impact of fast track land programs in stark terms: "The economic consequences of trying to implement such a large program, without considerably extending the time frame, will be highly negative because of the resources it would drain from the government's budget and from private capital".²⁹³ The UNDP also acknowledged that providing infrastructure and agricultural services to the resettled within even five years "will be impossible on the basis of the government's past track record and its current implementation capacity....Most settlers are not well-prepared for farming, since infrastructure development in most cases is totally inadequate".²⁹⁴ The UNDP complained that "the policy-making process and program implementation have become so eclectic that it is no longer possible to predict, on the basis of objective criteria, who is likely to be affected by the program or benefit from it".²⁹⁵

In fact, it was not that difficult to identify beneficiaries. Justice for Agriculture, a commercial farmers' group, released a list in late February 2003 that identified 1,000 farms, their location and size and the names of the new farmers and former owners.²⁹⁶ The land on the list approached 2

²⁹¹ *Africa Confidential* 45, no. 10 (14 May 2004).

²⁹² *The Washington Post*, 23 June 2004.

²⁹³ UNDP, *Zimbabwe Land Reform and Resettlement: Assessment and Suggested Framework for the Future*, UNDP Interim Mission Report, January 2002.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁶ Justice for Agriculture split off from the Commercial Farmers' Union in early 2002, frustrated with what it saw as its overly accommodating approach in dealing with the

million hectares, with an average farm size of 1,975 hectares.²⁹⁷ Mugabe's relatives, numerous ZANU-PF parliamentarians, high-ranking military and police officers, senior civil servants, commissioners, provincial governors, councillors, war veterans, farmers and businessmen all received farms. The majority of allottees did not appear to be farmers. Within a few days of the report's release, the leak of a confidential presidential audit appeared to confirm that widespread corruption and lawlessness was involved in the farm seizures.²⁹⁸ An insider explained:

A number of ZANU-PF officials want to settle the chaos on the farms. They want to expose the looters and the thieves within the ruling party. Those who want to resolve the chaos are the real ZANU-PF; the real liberation guys. They detest the indiscipline that has resulted from the hijacking of the party by extremist elements".²⁹⁹

Between May 2000, when Mugabe pushed the fast track program through parliament, and February 2003, the agriculture minister reported that 2,670 farms totalling 5,069,782 hectares had been acquired for resettlement of small-scale communal area farmers under the A1 model. For A2 resettlements, 2,209 farms had been acquired, totalling 4,934,892 hectares. Under the A2 model, a maximum farm size of 300 hectares in Mashonaland and 750 hectares in Midlands had been established for the new class of indigenous commercial farm owners.³⁰⁰ In practice, however, the limits have been breached, in terms of both farm size and number of farms per farmer. At the local land committee level, there continues to be much confusion over the A1 and A2 designations, resulting in disputes between small-scale farmers from the communal areas and indigenous commercial farmers.³⁰¹

government. Justice for Agriculture has consistently taken a harder line and fought land acquisitions in court. See www.swradioafrica.com/pages/farms.htm

²⁹⁷ Presumably many of these farms are scheduled to be subdivided then allocated to several farmers, though it is not clear how.

²⁹⁸ *Africa Confidential* 44, no. 4 (21 February 2003). The leaked report was entitled *The Addendum to the Land Reform and Resettlement Program National Audit Interim Report* and dated February 2003. The source of the leak and the authenticity of the report were the subjects of an article in *The Sunday Mirror*, 16 March 2003.

²⁹⁹ ICG interview in South Africa, March 2003.

³⁰⁰ Although the government initially indicate that A2 farms would average about 100 hectares, the maximum size of farms under this plan was constantly adjusted upwards as key figures associated with the government amassed larger and larger holdings.

³⁰¹ *Africa Confidential* 44, no. 4 (21 February 2003).

More than 300 commercial farmers were arrested in 2002 for defying orders to vacate their farms.³⁰² In December 2002 and January 2003, the government continued to publish orders for the compulsory acquisition of farms in its gazette and the state newspaper, *The Herald*.³⁰³ In early 2003, it repeatedly stated that the land seizures were over, and the issue had become one of supporting resettled farmers and restoring productivity.³⁰⁴ In spite of this, the seizure process continued, with the best farms still going principally to officials in the ruling party and military, and many small-scale farmers originally resettled from communal areas being expelled because those officials coveted their property.³⁰⁵

Justice for Agriculture claimed that 77 farms had been listed for seizure in January and February 2003, and ZANU-PF youth militias were enforcing illegal evictions.³⁰⁶ On 9 May 2003, another 38 farms were listed for compulsory acquisition.³⁰⁷ The government has become increasingly sensitive to the charges of massive corruption, however. In July 2003, President Mugabe ordered top ZANU-PF officials with multiple farms to relinquish all but one within two weeks, but in September it was reported that out of all these ZANU-PF officials, only one provincial governor had surrendered any property.³⁰⁸ Even some of those farms that had not been issued with acquisition orders continued to have problems with war veterans, army officers and other prominent government supporters demanding them.³⁰⁹ Stability and the rule of law had not reappeared in the farming sector, and the government had lost any credibility that its redistribution was

³⁰² BBC, 7 November 2002.

³⁰³ *The Herald*, numerous issues. Government gazettes for December 2002 and January 2003.

³⁰⁴ *Sunday Mail*, front section, 19 January 2003. ZANU-PF Secretary for Information Nathan Shamuyarira, BBC, 20 January 2003.

³⁰⁵ The Zimbabwe government itself has produced an audit of the fast track resettlement program that found countless abuses by senior ZANU-PF and military officials against the "one man, one farm" principle, often at the expense of small-scale farmers who were resettled and then driven off the land. This report was prepared by the minister of state for land reform in the vice president's office, Flora Buka. *Financial Times* (London), 20 February 2003 and *Africa Confidential* 44, no. 4, 21 February 2003. In May 2003, Mugabe appointed a team of experts to undertake a comprehensive review of the fast track land distribution program and the alleged irregularities and to make recommendations for corrective measures: *Mail & Guardian*, 15 May 2003. Available at www.mg.co.za.

³⁰⁶ News24 (South Africa), 19 February 2003.

³⁰⁷ Justice for Agriculture Legal Communiqué 2/2, 9 May 2003.

³⁰⁸ "Officials forced to implement, 'one man, one farm'", IRIN, 31 July 2003; "Resettled farmers are returning to communal areas", IRIN, 4 September 2003.

³⁰⁹ Situation reports from the Commercial Farmers' Union and Justice for Agriculture during 2003 and 2004 amply demonstrate the threats of violence and arrest that farmers continue to face. In most cases, the police have failed to help.

real reform. Consequently, a return to agricultural productivity remained distant.

In 2000, 4,500 commercial farms existed, mostly white-owned. As of late 2003, it was estimated that 2,500 commercial farmers remained in Zimbabwe, with over 1,000 still owning their properties, but less than 900 commercial farms still operating, and most well below capacity. Almost all members of the Commercial Farmers' Union (CFU) have been affected by land acquisition in some form. The CFU says 700 to 800 farms are reasonably active, although that number is shrinking. Few farmers have been compensated for land, and most have received about 20 per cent of the value for improvements on the land such as buildings or equipment. Most have registered formal complaints about land seizures and resisted pressure to turn over formal titles. Many white commercial farmers still operating bribe ZANU-PF officials. Others have entered into arrangements to farm land the government has acquired and share the profits. These cases are under-reported, largely because farmers engaged in such arrangements are embarrassed. The remaining commercial farmers are waiting in the cities or towns to see what the government intends and whether legal action or CFU negotiations will make any progress.

A poll released in December 2003 by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung found that the "land reform program as conducted by the government is viewed by significant percentages as having been a vote buying exercise that is likely to fail".³¹⁰ However, there remained strong support for redistribution that was fair, transparent and depoliticised. Given the government's approach, it is difficult to imagine how commercial agriculture will recover in the near-term. Donors are unwilling to fund projects on seized commercial farms that, although they would help agricultural production recover, would be seen as legitimising Mugabe's land seizures. As a donor official stressed, "We will not touch the former commercial farms other than humanitarian relief".³¹¹

Further uncertainty and destabilisation was caused by the government's apparent intention to embark upon large-scale – and perhaps ultimately complete – land nationalisation. In December 2003, it introduced amendments to the Land Acquisition Act that allowed it to acquire land and agro-businesses in the Export Processing Zone (commercial areas receiving assorted government incentives to increase competitiveness) and repeal the Hippo Valley Agreement Act of 1964, which encouraged development of large-scale sugar production in the low veld.³¹² In April

³¹⁰ Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, *Zimbabwe's Land Reform Program: An Audit of Public Perception*, December 2003.

³¹¹ ICG interview, 8 December 2003.

³¹² *Zimbabwe Independent*, 5 December 2003.

2004, the government evicted more than 1,500 farm workers and their families as they seized the multi-million dollar Kondozi farm, a large export-processing agricultural operation in eastern Zimbabwe. In June 2004, lands minister John Nkomo declared that the government did not intend to "waste time and money" in disputes with farmers about the legality of land seizures, saying, "In the end all land shall be state land and there will be no such thing called private land".³¹³ Nkomo indicated that all title deeds would be voided in favour of state-controlled leases, and that even wildlife conservancies outside of national parks would be managed through 25-year leases – an approach that would likely devastate Zimbabwe's wildlife population. Further signalling its confused approach to land, the government backed off from Nkomo's statements later in June 2004, with a government spokesman insisting "there has not been any change of government policy or law in respect of land tenure and ownership".³¹⁴ Despite its constantly shifting statements, it was clear that President Mugabe and his party supporters now viewed all land in Zimbabwe – whether it was held by black, white, commercial enterprises or conservation groups – as their personal domain, available to be taken with violence and exploited for private gain.

E. THE UTETE REPORT

In August 2003, the government released the Utete report, a presidential review of the land program commissioned to stem controversy regarding an earlier report by the minister of state for land reform in the vice president's office, Flora Buka.³¹⁵ The Buka report had caused public resentment and ZANU-PF infighting since it made clear that much redistributed land had gone directly to senior government officials, some of whom it named. A University of Zimbabwe professor said the Utete report was used "to absorb the critiques and present enough criticisms that it is seen as credible, but it is also a document that can be managed by the government. I don't think the government is serious about implementing this, but it has quieted debate within the party....ZANU-PF wants land reform to be put on the back burner".³¹⁶

A ZANU-PF parliamentarian claimed the Utete report was "sugar-coated but tough", and that "agricultural production has declined significantly, and that is a worry".³¹⁷ This same parliamentarian, while

³¹³ *The Daily Telegraph* (London), 9 June 2004.

³¹⁴ *The Herald*, 15 June 2004.

³¹⁵ Utete report, op. cit.

³¹⁶ ICG interview, Harare, 9 December 2003.

³¹⁷ ICG interview, Harare, 6 December 2003.

defending the government's approach, added that the "take-up rate has been pathetic", and far too many farms remain idle. He stated: "One could say that the program has destroyed the land market, and we need to rebuild it and rebuild it carefully". A former government official associated with the land redistribution program said of the take-up rate (the number of reallocated properties actually being farmed) on A2 farms, "30 per cent would be generous".³¹⁸ Nevertheless, more than 1,000 members of the ZANU-PF elite received farms.

To an extent, the Utete report was indeed a damage control exercise. It also provided a more reasonable face to the public and international community than much of the hardline government rhetoric over the last several years. It was clearly an effort to limit the internal ZANU-PF spats that had erupted over land benefits, while also trying to serve as a bridge to eventual reconciliation with the international community. In this sense it was a fairly shrewd ploy. The document reads very much as a broad defence of government policy but also offers some surprising candour. For example, although ZANU-PF and the government had long claimed that 300,000 families had been resettled, the report cited 134,000, and the government has since increasingly adopted that figure as its own. This broke down into 127,000 A1 beneficiaries of whom about 2.3 per cent were farm workers ("good party people" a person close to the report commented) and 7,000 resettled A2 farms.³¹⁹

The Utete report was also tough in a number of other areas, calling for land that had been redistributed but was underutilised to be returned to the government, removal of squatters from national parks and closer compliance with government regulations concerning acquisition and redistribution. In addition, it acknowledged that "political interference" had been common in land reallocation and called for fuller cost recovery, closer monitoring to ensure that people were not claiming multiple farms and substantial overhaul of the Grain Marketing Board. A member of the Utete team admitted that "the volume and speed of the program to meet a political imperative led to more people benefiting from the strength of political connections" and that within the government there is a "false belief we can go it alone", when broader economic pressures demand international cooperation.³²⁰

At the end of the day, the Utete report again demonstrated that the government can craft effective and reasonably persuasive rhetoric on land planning, but thus far it has been uncommitted to following through. That it would push through the sweeping amendments to the Land Acquisition

³¹⁸ ICG interview, Harare, 8 December 2003.

³¹⁹ ICG interview, Harare, 5 December 2003.

³²⁰ ICG interview, Harare, 6 December 2003.

Act, many directly counter to the report, again made clear its unwillingness to compromise on land.

F. AN ECONOMY IN FREEFALL

The breathtaking economic freefall has also continued. Zimbabwe now has the highest inflation and the fastest shrinking economy in the world. The IMF is moving forward with formal expulsion plans. A senior MDC politician argued plausibly, "Corruption is as bad as AIDS here".³²¹ The government seems to be almost systematically stripping assets, and any successor will be saddled with a heavy burden. An academic complained, "The biggest player in the parallel market – surprise, surprise – is the government".³²² Similarly, a farmer observed, "ZANU-PF is a business as much as it is a party".³²³ The World Economic Forum rated Zimbabwe as one of the worst investment climates in Africa, and the international corruption monitoring NGO Transparency International cited only the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola as more corrupt African states.³²⁴

Life, particularly for those on fixed incomes, is becoming extraordinarily difficult. With inflation peaking at an annualized rate of over 620 per cent in January 2004, many incomes were erased before they could be spent. The government even ran out of banknotes during the year, and investors increasingly rushed to withdraw whatever they could from local banks.

Real GDP shrank 0.7 per cent in 1999, 4.9 per cent in 2000, 8.4 per cent in 2001, and 13 per cent in 2002. It fell another 13.2 per cent in 2003 and is expected to decline 8.2 per cent in 2004. Foreign exchange reserves were down to \$60 million by year's end, and external debt was over 4.1 billion.³²⁵ Economists predict that inflation, which has cooled slightly, will remain over 400 per cent through 2004.³²⁶ All this occurs in a country with the world's second highest rate of AIDS prevalence and, as noted, more than 5 million people in need of food aid.

Nevertheless, the government spends more on military and police pay than health care.³²⁷ It emerged in June 2004 that the government was also

³²¹ ICG interview, Harare, 3 December 2003.

³²² ICG interview, Harare, 7 December 2003.

³²³ ICG interview, Harare, 5 December 2003.

³²⁴ *Zimbabwe Independent*, 4 June 2004.

³²⁵ "Zimbabwe Country Report", Economist Intelligence Unit, December 2003; and "Zimbabwe Country Report", Economist Intelligence Unit, June 2004; GDP was predicted to fall by a smaller 3.1 per cent in 2005.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

moving forward with plans to purchase \$200 million of Chinese fighter jets. Yet, adjusted for inflation, public spending was cut more than 50 per cent between 2000 and 2003.³²⁸ With the government doing its best to protect the budgets of the security services, that cut has fallen heaviest on social services.

The Economist Intelligence Unit complained that the government was resorting to "odd and ineffective methods of trying to resolve crises as they arise. Moreover, the bizarre nature of these measures reveals that there is now little constructive policy planning, merely ad hoc crisis management coupled with a hefty dose of wishful thinking".³²⁹ A senior Western diplomat echoed, "There is just no meeting of the minds within the cabinet about what constitutes a sane economic policy".³³⁰

While there has been a great deal of talk about international diplomacy and the MDC's political protests, it may well be the economy that ultimately forces change. Simply put, the current economic situation is remarkably unstable, and decades of capital and social investment are being lost. The ZANU-PF has consistently relied on patronage as the primary means to ensure the loyalty of its own senior members and the security services. As the funds that can be doled out to them run dry, President Mugabe could well face a rebellion, or more and more members of the elite may begin positioning themselves to leave with their profits. And the terrible economic pressures may push more MDC supporters into the streets.

G. THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

Most of 2003 and the first half of 2004 brought only more bad news. With the country somewhat off the international radar screen after intense scrutiny during the presidential election, a sense of fatigue seemed to have set in.³³¹ U.S. and UK diplomats appeared to feel that Mugabe was increasingly resistant to both carrots and sticks, and efforts to initiate an effective dialogue between the ZANU-PF and MDC generated more press than progress. A senior diplomat lamented that "the radicals are in charge", and "President Mugabe is increasingly cantankerous and unwilling to listen. He is impervious to pressure from both friends and allies". The space for democratic expression continued to diminish, while the government and security forces remained committed to keeping power at all costs. Much of the government's current efforts are dedicated to manipulating the playing field for forthcoming parliamentary elections.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ ICG interview, 8 December 2003.

³³¹ See ICG Report, *Zimbabwe: In Search of a New Strategy*, op. cit.

Whether a coordinated international approach could help depends greatly on South Africa. There is growing irritation in Pretoria about Mugabe. President Mbeki reportedly offered direct assurances to President Bush during a July 2003 meeting that the Zimbabwe situation would be resolved by the end of 2003. By toning down his rhetoric on Zimbabwe, the U.S. president gave South Africa the diplomatic lead, but there has been almost no progress, and the notion of any deadline continues to slip. Mbeki's credibility has eroded among U.S. officials. The fact that SADC continues largely to disassociate itself from international condemnation gives Mugabe considerable succour. Indeed, Mugabe received a standing ovation while attending President Mbeki's swearing in to his second term on 27 April 2004. At the Geneva meeting of the UN Commission on Human Rights in April 2004, South Africa led the charge to turn back an EU proposal to investigate reports of systematic human rights abuses in Zimbabwe. Mugabe even went out of his way to denounce Desmond Tutu as "an angry evil and embittered little bishop" in May 2004. However, some SADC leaders are devastating in their private criticism, and a growing circle of African leaders, less rooted in liberation movements and more wed to democratic politics and market economics than their predecessors, are willing to acknowledge that Mugabe's behaviour plays into the worst stereotypes that damage the continent's image.

A brokered deal between ZANU-PF and the MDC leading to a transition government and eventual elections remains the preferred option, and South Africa is still the single country with the capacity to help guide Mugabe and the parties. But negotiations would not be easy. Mugabe wants the MDC to drop any election challenges as a precondition, and he clearly desires an immunity guarantee, recognition as the father of the country and ability to pick his own successor. The MDC has pushed for abolition of the laws limiting civil rights that were adopted in the run-up to the 2002 presidential election, an inclusive transitional authority, a neutral electoral supervisory commission and considerable international economic aid, which it would no doubt claim credit for delivering. There is a great temptation for governments to regard any deal that could be worked out with ZANU-PF as acceptable, but reaching a compromise that would actually help Zimbabwe emerge from the crisis is more complex. A senior Western diplomat maintained that claims of a South African-brokered deal have "exaggerated both the extent and success of these discussions – particularly the prospects for their ultimate success". President Mbeki would rather pacify than resolve the situation, and his preferred solution is not an election, or the MDC in power, but a government of national unity with the MDC in a subordinate role. A senior diplomat insisted, "The ZANU-PF needs to recognise the MDC as a legitimate political force, and there is no sign of

that".³³² As the country moves toward parliamentary elections, Mugabe has become more repressive, cutting off international food aid, again overhauling election laws to his advantage, seizing properties and relying on militia groups to intimidate the general population and opposition politicians.

There is growing frustration with the lack of progress toward a negotiated settlement. An August 2003 survey by the Mass Public Opinion Institute found strong public support for dialogue between the MDC and ZANU-PF: "The two major parties are expected to compromise and climb down from the positions so far maintained".³³³ However, the MDC has stuck to its position that Mugabe should not be removed by violence, and a ZANU-PF parliamentarian commented, "A transition government will not work. The party opposes that in terms of ideology, and I don't think negotiations are going anywhere. We will have to wait for general elections to take place".³³⁴ ZANU-PF's unwillingness to embrace a negotiated solution is a recipe for further deterioration that could push the MDC to mass action strategies. Every day that the ZANU-PF fails to take power-sharing seriously, the likelihood that the crisis will be resolved by violent upheaval instead of discussions grows larger. While many would argue that public criticism of South Africa's role will only make the situation more difficult, Pretoria must be aware that it runs the risk of a major debacle. A senior UN official maintained, "It has been clear for the last couple of years that any solution to the land problem needs to be preceded by a political solution rather than the other way around".³³⁵ This same official continued, "my worry is that in practice there will be some kind of co-opted, cobbled, ZANU-PF-dominated coalition government after the election following which Mugabe 'retires' – which will be portrayed by everybody as transition but not in practice be a new broom".

The military has remained loyal to the ZANU-PF throughout the crisis, and few have seen fault lines emerging there. The Congo adventure, while deeply unpopular with the rank and file that did the fighting, served as a powerful mechanism to buy off the senior leadership. The army has frequently been deployed as the first resort for dealing with demonstrations and public unrest. While it seems unlikely that the military would actively support the MDC, it is possible that ordinary soldiers may have a growing distaste for such activity if economic conditions continue to deteriorate.

³³² ICG interview, Harare, 9 December 2003. On President Mbeki's preferences and motivations, see ICG Report, *Zimbabwe: In Search of a New Strategy*, op. cit.

³³³ Mass Public Opinion Institute, "Issues Surrounding the Formation of a Transitional Government in Zimbabwe", Harare, August 2003.

³³⁴ ICG interview, Harare, 6 December 2003.

³³⁵ ICG correspondence, 2 July 2004.

Within ZANU-PF there are multiple tensions regarding succession, and major infighting broke out within the party during the first half of 2004.³³⁶ Members would clearly like to see the party's rule survive Mugabe, and there must be serious concerns that his approach will make that more difficult. Emmerson Mnangagwa, the parliamentary speaker, had often been mentioned as a possible successor, although he is deeply unpopular. However, Mnangagwa became a target of a 2004 "anti-corruption" drive announced by President Mugabe. Finance Minister Chris Kuruneri was also a target of this initiative. Given the pervasive nature of corruption, much of it clearly sanctioned by Mugabe, the anti-corruption drive is a notable political development in that it appears Mugabe is increasingly concerned about threats to his rule emerging from within his own party. In addition to Mnangagwa, General Vitalis Zvinvashe, another hardliner, has also long eyed the presidency. They are the key leaders of one ZANU-PF faction. The other includes ZANU-PF party chair John Nkomo, former Finance Minister Simba Makoni, retired Army Commander Solomon Mujuru and Edison Zvobgo. This latter faction is usually seen as more palatable in the West, and many of its members are concerned that Zimbabwe's growing isolation is irreparably harming their long-term business interests. They would prefer a negotiated return to relations with the West that would keep them in power. But President Mugabe should not be expected to leave quietly, and some analysts have overplayed party divisions in suggesting that his government is in immediate danger of collapse. In June 2003, Mugabe told South African television, "As long as there is that fight, I am for a fight. And I can still punch".³³⁷ In 2004, Mugabe indicated that he hoped to remain in the presidency until 2008. Mugabe also continues to build a luxurious mansion in the Harare suburbs – another indication that he might plan on staying on the scene for some time.

On 8 December 2003, President Mugabe announced Zimbabwe's permanent withdrawal from the Commonwealth just hours after that body announced it was renewing the country's suspension. However, the Commonwealth meeting in Abuja indicated a growing level of frustration with the Mugabe government. More developing nations backed the suspension, although Mugabe retained a core of support. The SADC condemned the continued suspension as unhelpful, saying the position of some member states toward Zimbabwe was "dismissive, rigid and

³³⁶ For a fuller description of tensions within ZANU-PF, see ICG Report, *Zimbabwe: Danger and Opportunity*, op. cit.

³³⁷ *The Economist*, 12 June 2003.

intolerant".³³⁸ Initial signs that Mugabe was considering severing diplomatic ties with the UK appear to have been a bluff.

The platform distributed at the ZANU-PF congress in December 2003 was unrepentant in tone and in sharp contrast with the Utete report on land issues. It scoffed that a "tedious legal process has tended to pour icy cold water on what is a noble and lofty scheme" and said any notion that the land program could be reversed was "delusion".³³⁹ Combined with the on-again, off-again statements by the government in June 2004 that it intended to nationalise all land, ZANU-PF's land policy remains wholly subsidiary to its naked attempts to maintain power.

The MDC fared well in 2003 mayoral contests but has had trouble in 2004. MDC did take a majority of seats in urban council ballots during 2003 despite intimidation and rigging. Courts have begun to hear the complaints it lodged after the 2002 presidential contest, and the party has presented substantial evidence of vote rigging and intimidation. However, the MDC faces its share of challenges as it continues to try to define a sense of identity other than opposition to Mugabe. It released an extensive policy document to serve as a roadmap for reconstruction and development in the event of a transition.³⁴⁰ A credible effort by a party in opposition to establish some basic markers as to how it would govern, it maintains that the MDC would "rationalise" land policy:

The rationalisation of land allocation will reconcile the MDC's policy principles with on-the-ground realities of farm occupation by applying the principles of justice, accountability, need and ability. In carrying out this task, the Land Commission will – on a farm-by-farm basis or by dealing with categories of farms – adjudicate on the fairest and most practical course of action. Those who already own land, or who can afford to buy land, or who have an alternative source of livelihood, will not be eligible for resettlement. The views of local popular structures will be taken into account, as will the character of the land itself, which might be better used for non-agricultural purposes.³⁴¹

³³⁸ "African Body Slams Commonwealth", BBC News, 9 December 2003. Available at news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3304461.stm.

³³⁹ ZANU-PF, *Land and Land Reform*, ZANU-PF Central Committee Report, presented at the ZANU-PF Seventh Annual National People's Conference, December 2003. There was, however, a steady undercurrent of backbiting about Mugabe's leadership and the land issue at the party conference.

³⁴⁰ Movement for Democratic Change, *RESTART: Our Path to Social Justice*; The MDC's *Economic Program for Reconstruction, Stabilisation, Recovery and Transformation*, Harare, January 2004. See also ICG Report, *Zimbabwe: In Search of a New Strategy*, op. cit.

³⁴¹ Movement for Democratic Change, *RESTART*, op. cit.

The MDC's desire, as a besieged opposition party, to craft policies that appeal to a common denominator and do not alienate potential supporters can be seen in its approach to land. For example, the recent platform document also argued:

There is no possibility that the rationalisation will result in the pre-February 2000 status quo being restored on the land, but equally the current status quo arising from the fast track land grab will not be maintained. In other words, the MDC will neither return to the pre-2000 land-ownership patterns nor endorse or condone the inequitable and inappropriate land distribution arising from the fast track process.³⁴²

In short, the MDC's position on land is a careful strategic hedge that tries both not to alienate the international community and to avoid the ZANU-PF charge that it does the bidding of white outsiders.

However, the MDC did suffer a series of setbacks in by-elections during 2004, with some of them occurring in areas that had previously been MDC strongholds. The by-elections saw intense pressure by the government, including the mobilisation of youth militias, violence, highly selective law enforcement and a range of other tools of intimidation. The MDC has difficult choices to make about how best to tailor its resistance to the government. Much of the optimism of early protests has dimmed as the government hardened its position and employed more violence. The MDC has not had an easy time developing back-up plans when its primary strategies have come under pressure. Protest is difficult in a country where "you can get killed and nothing happens", as one agronomist put it.³⁴³ Increasingly desperate economic conditions have forced many individuals to concentrate on daily survival at the expense of political organising. Given the economic climate, President Mugabe may also engage in efforts to buy off some members of the opposition.³⁴⁴ The MDC needs to determine if it will contest the forthcoming parliamentary elections. This is an agonising decision that has opened some faultlines within the MDC. Certainly, Mugabe and the ZANU-PF have amply demonstrated that they can and will manipulate elections. Equally true, the MDC is reluctant to allow Mugabe to move forward uncontested or to create a vacuum that another opposition party might fill.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ ICG interview, 8 December 2003.

³⁴⁴ Interviews in Harare suggested that a small number of MDC members have benefited from the land redistribution program as part of a broader effort by the government to pacify the opposition.

The international community has had a difficult time striking the right balance in its dealings with the MDC. Some are unabashed cheerleaders and demonise ZANU-PF. Others seem to welcome every real and imagined MDC flaw and to rationalise continued reluctance to push for substantial change in Zimbabwe. A more balanced analysis would suggest that the MDC has taken a responsible and non-violent approach to its opposition role, but it does suffer some growing pains, and it is at a crucial fork in the road regarding the degree of its militancy against a government growing more authoritarian daily.

Amid the chaos, President Mugabe continues to try to keep his critics off balance. Hopefully, the international community has learned hard lessons from the broken promises of recent years and will not interpret token pauses in repression as a genuine breakthrough. President Mugabe began his tenure with tremendous promise and apparently genuine desire for national reconciliation, but his leadership has steadily decayed. Collective corruption and personal aggrandisement have made Zimbabwe a failing, and potentially failed, state.

In embracing the politics of land, President Mugabe picked very emotive causes – land, race, economic exploitation and historic injustice – which resonate deeply in the region. However, his invocation of these themes was entirely self-serving and not designed to achieve meaningful redress for lower- and middle-class blacks, but simply to indefinitely secure his hold on power. Major political change must come to Zimbabwe if it hopes to avoid turning an extended crisis into a violent conflict and broad social collapse. When political transition occurs, the land problem will be front and centre, and it is vital that both Zimbabwe and the international community are poised to deal with this thorny issue openly and with a sense of lasting vision, something that both have repeatedly failed to achieve.