



# HUMANITAD



ZIMBABWE



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## ZIMBABWE'S TRAGIC DECLINE

### **To Our International Leadership**

It is a fundamental tenet of any democracy that voters have the right to choose their leaders. The Commonwealth's Harare Declaration, adopted in the Zimbabwean capital in 1991, refers to the inalienable right of citizens of member states to participate by means of free and democratic processes in framing the society in which they live.

That participation cannot be meaningful if voters are unable to make an informed choice. That in turn depends upon their ability to hear a diversity of views. In Zimbabwe the government in September closed down the country's only independent daily newspaper, the Daily News. While a number of small weeklies have kept alight the torch of press freedom, the government of President Robert Mugabe has embarked on a concerted campaign to close what remains of democratic space. The gains of the 1990s, backed by a then-robust Supreme Court, have been steadily eroded. Draconian security legislation has made it an offense to cause disaffection against Mugabe's regime while gatherings of more than two people deemed by the police to be political are forbidden without their consent.

Newspapers now have to be registered under a sweeping press law called the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act. This requires all media organisations to be registered with a state-appointed Media Commission and makes it an offense for a newspaper to employ a journalist who is not accredited with the commission.

The Daily News chose to challenge the press law in the courts but was rebuffed by the



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Supreme Court which is now seen as susceptible to government manipulation following the forced resignation or retirement of many independent-minded judges. However, judges in lower courts can still be fiercely independent as the recent ruling compelling the Media Commission to register the Daily News clearly shows. It remains to be seen how the state will respond.

Despite examples of courageous individuals and civic groups standing up to Mugabe's tyranny, with a muzzled media, a suborned police and an electoral system run by the army, Zimbabwe has moved from a relatively free society three years ago to a totalitarian state today whose main ally is Cuba which regularly locks up journalists.

Behind this drastic curtailment of civil liberties is a programme of land seizures which has transferred 11 million hectares of commercial farmland to the state. While the Supreme Court has given its endorsement to this often violent and arbitrary process, the law has in many cases been openly violated as have the rights of farmers who have seen their life's work destroyed. An estimated 500 000 farm workers have been made homeless, livestock has been slaughtered and wildlife decimated. It is the only resettlement exercise in history where more people have been dispossessed than resettled.

As a result, agricultural production has fallen by an estimated 60 percent. From breadbasket of the region, Zimbabwe has become a basket case. This means that a country which only three years ago was self-sufficient in food production is now dependent upon aid from the very countries it brands as "enemies".

The United States and the European Union are the largest donors. Mugabe's publicists claim that 300 000 families have been resettled on the acquired farms. But a report commissioned by the government in October revealed that only 134 000 households had in fact been given land. Many of the beneficiaries are senior politicians, judges, policemen and army officers. Journalists in the state-owned media have also benefited.

Mugabe is unapologetic about the land grab. White commercial farmers had supported the opposition Movement for Democratic Change in rejecting the government's constitutional proposals in February 2000, he told the South African Broadcasting Corporation earlier this year. Therefore they became the target of "spontaneous" demonstrations by war veterans. The latest land audit confirms that political vengeance was the motive in government pursuing what it calls "fast-track" land reform.

One of the main factors identified for prompting government to undertake this course of action, the report of the land audit states, "is the rejection of the draft constitution in 2000 through the efforts of British-backed political opponents."

In other words Zimbabweans of all colours have been punished with land confiscation and starvation for supporting the party of their choice. Meanwhile, Mugabe's Zanu-PF militias stalk the land unrestrained visiting violence upon their political opponents. In the Midlands town of Kwekwe recently MDC candidates were prevented from registering in a municipal poll by a gang



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of ruling-party thugs. As a result the MDC is unrepresented on the council of a town where it has considerable support and where its then virtually unknown MP defeated a senior minister in the 2000 parliamentary election.

Nothing could more forcefully contradict the terms of the Commonwealth's Harare Declaration than this crude denial of democratic rights. Yet South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki has been leading a campaign to have Zimbabwe's suspension from the "Club" lifted. The suspension followed the report of a Commonwealth team of observers which found Mugabe's reelection in March 2002 to be seriously flawed. Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo, after visiting Harare with Mbeki earlier this year, was persuaded to write to premier John Howard of Australia saying law and order had been restored in Zimbabwe. He gave as an example a police investigation into the torture of a prominent opposition MP by police.

Not only has that investigation been stalled but in mid-October a lawyer who had defended journalists in court cases was severely assaulted by police at a police station after she was the victim of a car hijacking. Police still haven't found the individuals who bombed the Daily News' printing press in 2001, nor have they made any arrests of the army personnel who abducted and tortured two journalists in 1999. The killers of commercial farmers continue to walk free as do the assassins of two MDC activists in the 2000 election campaign. A state security agent named in court in connection with the killing of the activists is responsible for directing a campaign of terror in Chimanimani, in the east of the country.

It is said that the media attention Zimbabwe has received abroad can in part be ascribed to ties of kith and kin in Britain, South Africa and Australia. While this may be partly true, a more likely explanation would be the horror felt in many parts of the world at the way a once successful and relatively prosperous country enjoying many of the freedoms found in democracies elsewhere was transformed into a violent dictatorship where corruption and lawlessness prevailed, forcing its brightest and most talented citizens into exile.

Zimbabwe today is infinitely poorer in terms of per capita GDP than it was at independence in 1980, or even in 1975 at the height of international sanctions and the bush war. Its decline - and with it the destruction of its rich wildlife and other natural resources - is one of the great tragedies of modern Africa.

Progressive nations are understandably horrified. The lesson is obvious: democracy can never be taken for granted. It has to be defended against populist demagogues claiming a national mandate and the mantle of history. Their pretensions need to be exposed and resisted before they impoverish the people they claim to champion. While leaders, such as those in southern Africa who have excused and even endorsed the misrule currently blighting Zimbabwe, are also partly to blame, history may be equally unforgiving of those who stand by and watch.

**Iden Wetherell**

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## Just Another African Saga

By Gail Adams

“Recent estimates indicate that around 34 percent of Zimbabwe’s 15-40 age group is HIV-positive and that more than 2,500 people die every week of AIDS-related causes. Poverty and poor nutrition accelerate the process.”

*(Source: UN OCHA Integrated Regional Information Network. 31 Jul 2003)*

“More than half the population of Zimbabwe is in need of food aid.”

*(Source: UN OCHA Integrated Regional Information Network. 31 Jul 2003)*

“As a result of land reform, large-scale agriculture produced only about one-tenth of its 1990s output.”

“Zimbabwe has entered its fifth successive year of economic decline. The country faces critical shortages of foreign exchange; inflation has reached 364 percent and is forecast to hit over 500 percent by the end of the year.”

*(Source: Jhb IRIN-SA. 31 July 2003)*

“A recent joint assessment by WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organisation found that about 3.3 million Zimbabweans are currently in urgent need of food aid. By January 2004, that number is expected to jump to 5.5 million. ‘People are so desperate for food that at some distribution sites beneficiaries have been seen opening and eating uncooked rations on the spot. Some reportedly lack the strength to even carry their food home,’ WFP said.”

*(Source: Agence France-Presse. 13 August 2003)*

“August 23: UN officials threatened to halt food relief to Zimbabwe yesterday if President Mugabe’s government goes ahead with plans to take over control of the distribution of aid.”

***“Our eyes skim the lines.***

***Just another set of shocking statistics.***

***But we’re not shockable anymore.***

***We can’t be expected to care for everyone!***

***Horror brutalizes. Familiarity brutalizes.***

***Inability to act brutalizes.***

***And we’re all brutalized”***



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Why am I saying all this? Politician, economist, scientist, national leader, patient in a dentist's waiting room - whoever you are - we are all completely familiar with these... what do we call them now? bites. These gobbets of news in easily (??) digestible format. "That old rogue what's-his-name...Mugabe... still there?" we muse, before turning the page. "How do they manage?" we think, before the blonde TV newscaster with the great cleavage moves effortlessly on to the next story. "It never changes, does it?" we murmur quietly, when the topic of starvation or AIDS in Africa makes its obligatory turn around the social dining table.

Then, of course, there's the spin. These statistics, those facts - who can we trust nowadays to give the bare unvarnished facts and allow us, respect us enough to make up our own minds? Spin seems to be another word for lying: omitting part of the truth, using semantics to avoid truth. If you stop and think, all that really means is lying. And we listen to our leaders, our bosses, ourselves, spinning away.

I must say I'm not happy about bringing up the subject of Zimbabwe myself. (The Editor suggested the article and I said I'd think about it...) It takes monumental effort to turn one's attention to even considering, seriously, yet another of the world's countless misery stories. There are so many. So many. Is this one worse than that? How does this one merit our sympathy, even our time? Can I turn it to my advantage? After all, an article out there could impress another editor, possibly get me more work. Let's see now... Zimbabwe, eh? OK, let's give it a whirl...

And then there's the fact that I lived there for many pre-independence years - reading the news on television and radio: telling the nation what our leaders thought they ought to know. (Plus ca change! One can still hear the same omissions, the same slant of a story in any news bulletin anywhere in the world.) I haven't been to Zimbabwe in a long time now: at first it hurt too much even to think about the place; later, after I realised the damage caused by our colonial arrogance, I found I'd lost touch with the place, the people.

Still, that's what the net's for isn't it, catching up. Let's see what we can come up with.... "Paradza sues for \$500m" In what could be the biggest civil suit in the country's history, High Court Judge Benjamin Paradza is suing Justice minister Patrick Chinamasa and government for \$500 million in damages suffered when he was unlawfully arrested on corruption charges in February." (*Source: Zimbabwe Independent. 19 September 2003*).

To find out the other side of the story I checked the Zimbabwe Government website but it hasn't been updated since 1 March, 2001. ZANU-PF's website was more promising: "Justice Paradza's arrest has nothing to do with politics" - By Our Chief Political



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Correspondent. “Recent claims by The Daily News that High Court Judge, Justice Benjamin Paradza’s arrest was a result of his several rulings against the government should be dismissed with the contempt they deserves.”

After the arrest of Justice Paradza on February 17, The Daily News suggested in its report that the judge had been arrested for allegedly ordering the release of the Executive Mayor of Harare, Engineer Elias Mudzuri and 20 others after they had been arrested for allegedly holding an “illegal meeting”. Justice Paradza’s lawyer, Mr Jonathan Samkange of Byron Venturas also told ZBC’s Newsnet that his client was being persecuted for not serving certain interests, a claim that was refuted by the government.”

The truth of the matter is that Justice Paradza was arrested on charges of attempting to defeat the course of justice and appeared before provincial magistrate Mishrod Gwamombe and was remanded out of custody on a \$20 000 bail.

He also faces an alternative charge of trying to persuade Justices Maphios Meda and George Chiweshe to breach a section of the Prevention of Corruption Act.” Or this, perhaps: “Reprieve for Daily News.” The High Court yesterday ordered police to immediately vacate the premises of Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ) and allow the re-opening of the group’s titles, the Daily News and Daily News on Sunday, that were closed last week. It also ordered the return of equipment confiscated this week.” (*Source: Zimbabwe Independent 19 September 2003*).

In the four years it was published the Daily News became Zimbabwe’s largest circulation paper. It uncovered numerous corruption scandals and regularly exposed state violence and human rights abuses. The paper continued publishing despite two bombings, including one which destroyed its printing press.

“Daily News editors and reporters have been jailed and beaten by Mugabe’s supporters. In one incident a rural schoolteacher found with a copy of the Daily News was beaten to death by Mugabe’s youth militia.” (*Source: Guardian.co.uk. Andrew Meldrum, Pretoria. 21 September 2003*).

Come on now, no more spin, no more politically correct talk please! I’m not asking you to say anything out loud. To stand up at your next meeting or speech and commit yourself to.. ..what...? I’m not even begging you to read this short article - because, honestly, I don’t have much faith that you will. I’m merely writing it because, now it’s begun, I am starting to feel more energy, more attention, more interest. But it seems to me that there is really nothing I can do about it. The dire situation in Zimbabwe, that is. A little (or a lot of) money pushed the



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way of one deserving charity/action group or other; if I was younger, possibly volunteering my services somewhere foreign (and, let's be honest, vaguely exciting) for a month or two; lobbying or writing to some faceless name at the UN or somewhere...What else? Anything else is Nothing. At least so it seems, the way we do things. Let's be honest again: don't we pause to look concerned about these stories from time to time (and in the right environment) because we don't want to notice that we've lost our own humanity? Sir, madam, I have news for you. We have lost our humanity.

Any protest, silent or voiced, is useless and you know it. A few truly compassionate souls exist, it's clear they must. But not enough to make a difference, it seems. Not enough to balance the dictators, the cheats, the liars, the eminences gris, the ambitious, greedy, the self-ish or seemingly modest people that make up 'us'. Not enough to balance out the rest of us.

What is compassion anyway? ('Pity inclining one to help or be merciful' says my Oxford Dictionary of Current English. Glory be!

*That's* what we've bastardised the word into becoming, is it? Me, all-powerful, up here...you, poor bugger, down there.)

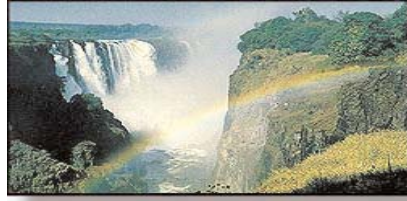
What is compassion? We all *'know'* what it means. But clearly, we've forgotten what it points to... what compassion *is*. Can you look into yourself and see a trace of compassion? Not self-serving pity. Not self-serving generosity. Not self-serving sympathy. Compassion. (Selflessness, isn't it?) ?? ....Me neither.

OK, let's stay with the Self... Imagine being on the wrong side of this: "The Human Rights Forum recorded high incidence of torture by state agents in May and June 2003, although the government denied any knowledge of such activities. Yet it was plausible for victims to conclude that perpetrators that were dressed in army and police regalia were ZNA and ZRP personnel; a conclusion which seems to have been given merit by the victims' transportation in police or army vehicles to places at which they were tortured or detention at police stations following arrests and torture by these individuals. Violence disguised as exercise of freedom of expression could not be condoned but neither could torture as a means of law enforcement or investigation. Several victims also alleged the presence and active involvement of the Minister of Youth Development, Gender and Employment Creation, Elliot Manyika, in their victimisation and torture, a clear sign of State acquiescence with the prevailing events." (Source" *Latest report from the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO* ).

So what can I, you, do about it? Sure as hell, we're not going to get the world out of



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the mess we've made of it unless we come up with some different answers, for a start. A completely different way of being, acting.

'Thinking' works perfectly for practical purposes. But when we apply *thought* to matters of our attitudes, habits, thinking patterns, problems outside the arena of cause-and-effect, it's perfectly clear it does not work. That's why we can watch horror in a television news bulletin, try to solve someone else's grief or pain, be shocked, revolted, shamed....and carry on with our everyday life moments later. Thought allows us to. Well, it's true, isn't it? Tell me it's not just me who 'deals' with the mess we've made of the world, in this way. Tell me about a different way of looking at crisis after crisis and not looking away afterwards. *Please*. A lot of people would love to know a way out of this. Wouldn't you? A new way of being, acting? What's happening now is like allopathic medicine: putting plasters on wounds, drugging pain. We're not looking for causes.

Some look at Zimbabwe's plight and blame Mugabe; others blame the British before him. Perhaps he learned about torture and stealing land from them? And perhaps the international diplomatic community simply allowed him to become an absolute dictator, burning newspaper offices, watching all manner of corruption to flourish - looking the other way, in their own governments' particular interests?

Whatever our own particular theory or assumption, we merely put a plaster on the wound, (possibly causing another problem in the process,) and consider ourselves intelligent, charitable. Whatever. But if we can find the causes in ourselves, perhaps we find a cure for the world too. Every spiteful impulse, each hard-eyed look, all those fleeting feelings of being right or better - isn't that the cause of a knock-on effect? (This doesn't mean, I hasten to add, an alternative behaviour of smiling a lot and telling others how good we feel).

It means being honest. Truly honest, with oneself. It means looking into our own tiny fleeting meanness and bitterness and jealousy and envy and hatred. Our secret petty thoughts and actions (because deliberate thought is an act just as much as an outward, physical one).

Noticing our lack of care and caring in the small daily world we each call 'My Life'. Nothing more, just noting it. Not trying to obliterate it, or change it, or improve on it. Merely actually noticing when we are unkind or imperious or impatient or a bit too clever. Know what I mean?

Maybe that alone will change our behaviour, our thought patterns, make us that much more alive. And, friend, we need to be more alive! While we're trashing the world, we're killing ourselves too. And I have a feeling that looking into the mirror is going to beat anything else in the whole world for sheer Hard.