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The Crisis in Zimbabwe: How the U.S. Should Respond

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The United States and human rights NGOs have sought to raise international awareness of the genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan and spur international action to address the situation. This effort is warranted but should not distract from the ongoing crisis in Zimbabwe, which has also caused great suffering and a large refugee population.

In a ruthless, seven-year campaign to maintain political power, President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe has targeted his opponents for abuse, legal harassment, and economic punishment. At the same time, he has used his authority to reward allies and elicit support from the police, the military, and other key groups. These policies have resulted in a precipitous economic decline, political repression, and humanitarian crisis rivaling that in Darfur. Recent attacks on opposition party leaders have drawn worldwide attention. The United States should strengthen its existing sanctions on Zimbabwe and press other nations and international organizations to ratchet up pressure on Mugabe and his supporters.

History of a Crisis. Spurred by a decades-long civil war and economic sanctions, the government of Rhodesia accepted a series of agreements in 1979 that led to the establishment of the Republic of Zimbabwe. Robert Mugabe, one of the leaders of the Zimbabwean independence effort, became Zimbabwe's first prime minister in 1980 and president in 1987. He has been the country's sole leader since it gained independence.

In its first decade, Zimbabwe achieved steady economic growth while pursuing efforts to recover

from the civil war and provide education, health care, and other governmental services. But by the mid-1990s, inflation, unemployment, and growing political repression led to discontent, protests, and the formation of the first major opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), in 1999. The MDC achieved its first major victory when its campaign managed to defeat a constitutional amendment that would have "legalized the president's continued rule, made government officials immune from prosecution, and allowed uncompensated seizure of white-owned land for redistribution to black farmers."¹ The MDC capitalized on this victory by winning nearly half the seats of parliament in the 2000 election despite numerous efforts by Mugabe's ZANU-PF party to influence the election in its favor.

Stung by the first substantial challenge to his power in 20 years of ruling Zimbabwe, Mugabe has employed increasingly brutal tactics to intimidate and undermine the political opposition. According to the State Department 2006 Human Rights Report:

The ruling party's dominant control and manipulation of the political process through intimidation and corruption effec-

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tively negated the right of citizens to change their government. Unlawful killings and politically motivated kidnappings occurred. The state sanctioned the use of excessive force and torture, and security forces tortured members of the opposition, union leaders, and civil society activists.... Security forces arbitrarily arrested and detained journalists, demonstrators, and religious leaders; lengthy pretrial detention was a problem. Executive influence and interference in the judiciary were problems. The government continued to forcibly evict citizens and to demolish homes. The government continued to use repressive laws to suppress freedom of speech, press, assembly, movement, association, and academic freedom. Government corruption and impunity remained widespread. High ranking government officials made numerous public threats of violence against demonstrators.²

According to the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, there were 368 incidents of torture from January through November 2006, over 500 politically motivated assaults, and 11 politically motivated abductions/kidnappings.³ Other, specific examples of political repression include these:

- Both the presidential election in 2002 and the parliamentary elections in 2005 were deemed “neither free nor fair” by international observers and resulted in President Robert Mugabe’s and the ruling ZANU-PF party’s continued political

domination of Zimbabwe. Election observers reported numerous incidents of intimidation and abuse against opposition supporters.⁴

- The government launched Operation Murambatsvina (Drive Out Trash) in May 2005. The operation was ostensibly intended to remove illegal housing settlements but, in reality, operated as a program of political intimidation and retaliation against poor, urban supporters of the political opposition. Over 700,000 people lost their homes or livelihoods due to Operation Murambatsvina.⁵
- Earlier this year, the government imposed a blanket ban on political rallies from February 20 until May 20.⁶ On March 11, government troops arrested dozens of MDC members and severely beat opposition activists who attended a Save Zimbabwe Campaign prayer meeting. Those injured included MDC leaders Morgan Tsvangirai and Arthur Mutambara, and one man was killed.⁷ Zimbabwean police also stormed the offices of Zimbabwe’s labor movement, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, and harassed and assaulted staff while seizing documents, files, and videotapes.⁸ British Ambassador to Zimbabwe Andrew Pockock called the latest political attacks “ghastly and barbaric.”⁹ United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice condemned Mugabe’s regime as “ruthless and repressive.”¹⁰ U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon criticized the attacks as violations of “the basic democratic right of citi-

1. Lauren Ploch, “Zimbabwe: Current Issues and U.S. Policy,” CRS Report for Congress, March 13, 2007, summary and pp. 1–2.
2. “Zimbabwe,” Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2006, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, March 6, 2007, at www.state.gov/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78765.htm.
3. Ploch, p. 15.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 3–6.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 15–20.
6. Tony Hawkins, “Mugabe bans political rallies after clash,” *The Financial Times*, February 22, 2007, p. 5.
7. Amnesty International, “Zimbabwe: Calls for investigation into killing of activist and release of peaceful protestors,” Press Release, March 12, 2007, at <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAFR460012007>.
8. Michael Wines, “50 Protesters Hospitalized in Zimbabwe After Beatings,” *The New York Times*, March 14, 2007, p. A8.
9. Basildon Peta, “Injured Tsvangirai vows to fight on for change in Zimbabwe,” *The Independent*, March 14, 2007, at <http://news.independent.co.uk/world/africa/article2355972.ece>.
10. Tony Hawkins, “US warns Mugabe over clampdown on opposition,” *The Financial Times*, March 14, 2007, p. 7.

zens to engage in peaceful assembly” and called on “the authorities to allow peaceful assembly and to provide a space for the exercise of legitimate political rights.”¹¹

Despite international criticism, the political attacks continued. Mugabe responded to foreign critics by telling them to “go hang” and threatened to throw Western ambassadors out of the country for interfering in its internal affairs.¹²

These latest incidents of repression follow years of mismanagement by Mugabe’s government that have left the country in crisis.

Economic Collapse. When Mugabe assumed leadership of Zimbabwe in 1980, he inherited well-developed manufacturing and mining sectors, a competitive agricultural sector, a thriving tourist industry, and sound infrastructure. The country has rich mineral deposits of asbestos, chromite, coal, copper, diamonds and other gems, gold, iron ore, nickel, and platinum. To solidify his hold on power, Mugabe has pursued a number of policies over the past decade that have crippled the Zimbabwean economy.

Seizures and Redistribution of Farmland. Considered the breadbasket of Africa only a decade ago, Zimbabwe is now unable to feed itself and regularly appeals to international programs for food aid. Zimbabwe’s agricultural success resulted from its modern, large-scale commercial farms. These farms were largely owned by white Zimbabweans, many of whom supported the MDC. Beginning in 2000, Mugabe’s administration began forcibly seizing commercial farms owned by white Zimbabweans. The stated aims of this program was to redistribute land to black Zimbabweans, but most of the land ended up in the hands of Mugabe’s supporters. According to the Department of State,

Implementation of the government’s ongoing redistribution of expropriated, white owned, commercial farms substantially favored the ruling party elite and continued to lack transparency. Top ruling party officials continued to hand pick multiple farms and register them in the names of family members to evade the government’s one farm policy. The government continued to allow individuals aligned with top officials to seize land not designated for acquisition.

The land redistribution program has effectively destroyed Zimbabwe’s commercial agriculture sector. Large farms were broken up into smaller, less profitable plots and given to individuals with little experience in farming. Production plummeted. Production of tobacco, previously the largest export crop, fell from 2 million kilograms in 2000 to 60,000 kilograms in 2006.¹³ Production of corn, the country’s primary grain, has fallen sharply since 2000, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that Zimbabwe will produce just 850,000 tons of corn this year, less than half of its domestic needs.¹⁴

Irresponsible Monetary Policy and Rampant Inflation. Inflation has exceeded 1,000 percent since April 2006, and the country now has the highest rate of inflation in the world. In March 2007, Zimbabwe’s inflation rate rose to 1,729 percent,¹⁵ and the International Monetary Fund predicts it will top 4,000 percent by the end of the year.¹⁶ Inflation has impoverished the working population, whose wages have not kept pace with the rising costs of basic necessities like food, cooking oil, and clothing. Doctors and nurses have been on strike seeking a pay raise of nearly 9,000 percent. Teachers staged a work slowdown despite a raise of 300 percent in January and succeeded in winning a 400 percent raise in

11. “Secretary-General Urges Release of Detained, Beaten Zimbabwe Opposition Leaders,” Secretary-General Document SG/SM/10908, U.N. Department of Public Information, March 12, 2007, at www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2007/sgsm10908.doc.htm.

12. “Mugabe tells critics to ‘go hang,’” BBC News, March 15, 2007, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6454827.stm>, and “Zimbabwe summons, threatens to expel Western envoys,” Reuters, March 19, 2007.

13. Andrew Meldrum, “Zimbabwe is broke and hungry,” *The Guardian*, March 1, 2007, p. 20.

14. “Key facts about Zimbabwe’s crisis,” Reuters, at www.zimbabwejournalists.com/story.php?art_id=1944&cat=2.

15. World News Digest, “Zimbabwe annual inflation hits 1,729%,” *The Financial Times*, March 10, 2007, p. 8.

16. Meldrum, “Zimbabwe is broke and hungry.”

February.¹⁷ Some workers find that their daily wages are taken up by bus fare to and from work.¹⁸ Yet, as noted by *The Daily Telegraph*, “It takes only a few weeks for the value of every pay rise given to civil servants to be wiped out. But the bankrupt regime can only cover the cost of further wage rises by printing money—which fuels inflation still further and creates pressure for yet more pay increases.”¹⁹ Local governments cannot meet budgets or provide basic services, and with prices soaring, businesses are unable to afford raw materials.

Disastrous Economic Policies. Zimbabwe maintains an official exchange rate of Z\$250 to US\$1, but the unofficial exchange market trades at Z\$7,000 to the US\$1 or even lower.²⁰ Zimbabwe’s government ran a deficit of 43 percent of GDP in 2006, and the economy shrunk by over 7 percent in 2005.²¹ The government maintains subsidies and price controls for key commodities, including gasoline, bread, agricultural seeds, fertilizer, and other basic goods, and for favored sectors of the economy.²² The government recently announced that all prices are to be frozen from March 1 to June 30 and that anyone raising prices will be arrested and punished.²³ As a result of these policies, Zimbabwe has experienced persistent shortages of foreign exchange, fuel, and food. Black markets, which can evade the price restrictions, have flourished.

In addition, Mugabe has seized or encouraged his supporters to impede businesses owned by political

opponents and threatened to nationalize entire sectors of the economy without compensation. This process is already underway. In 2006, Mugabe announced that the government intended to expropriate 51 percent of all mines without providing any compensation. In an effort to clamp down on private mining, the government arrested as many as 20,000 miners in late 2006 and early 2007.²⁴ Most recently, Mugabe announced plans for the government to take control of Zimbabwe’s diamond mines.²⁵

Land expropriation, obviation of property rights, and unrealistic price controls and exchange rates have led the economy to contract every year since 1998 and by 34 percent overall between 1998 and 2005 in constant terms.²⁶ Per-capita GDP has fallen by 38 percent over that period, from \$675 to \$422.²⁷ An estimated 30 percent of Zimbabwe’s population lived in poverty in 1999; today, over 80 percent are believed to live in poverty.²⁸ Direct foreign investment is non-existent, and the unemployment rate exceeds 80 percent.²⁹

Humanitarian Disaster. Mugabe’s economic and political policies have had a dire effect on the people of his country. Most immediately, the government land redistribution program has devastated agricultural production, and Zimbabwe, which once exported food crops, is now dependent on international food assistance to avoid starvation. Five million Zimbabweans received food assistance in the first quarter of 2006.³⁰ According to the U.S.

17. Michael Wines, “Zimbabwe: Teachers End Strike After Pay Deal,” *The New York Times*, February 24, 2007, p. 6.

18. Michael Wines, “As Inflation Soars, Zimbabwe Economy Plunges,” *The New York Times*, February 7, 2007, p. A1.

19. Peta Thornycroft, “Zimbabwe on the brink of total collapse,” *The Daily Telegraph*, February 9, 2007, p. 19.

20. Meldrum, “Zimbabwe is broke and hungry.”

21. Tony Hawkins, “Zimbabwe reveals budget deficit of 43% of GDP,” *Financial Times*, December 1 2006, and World Bank, World Development Indicators Online. Data are in constant U.S. dollars.

22. Tim Kane, Kim R. Holmes, and Mary Anastasia O’Grady, *2007 Index of Economic Freedom* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation and Dow Jones & Company, Inc., 2007), p. 398.

23. Wines, “As Inflation Soars, Zimbabwe Economy Plunges.”

24. Peta Thornycroft, “Miners arrested as Mugabe eyes goldfields,” *The Daily Telegraph*, January 10, 2007, p.13.

25. Bloomberg News, “Zimbabwe: Takeover of Diamond Mines,” *New York Times*, February 22, 2007, p. C15.

26. World Development Indicators Online. Data are in constant 2000 U.S. dollars.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Andrew Meldrum, “Zimbabwe heads for economic meltdown,” *The Guardian*, February 7, 2007, p. 19.

29. Ploch, summary and p. 2.

Agency for International Development, “In November 2006, more than 3,000 [metric tons] of food was distributed to at least 500,000 people [by the World Food Programme and its partners].... The Zimbabwe vulnerability assessment estimates that about 1.4 million rural people will not have sufficient entitlements with which to access adequate food during the peak hunger period....”³¹ UNICEF estimates that up to 2 million people are vulnerable to starvation.³² Worse, numerous sources report that food aid is being distributed by the Mugabe government to reward supporters and punish those who support the opposition.

The government’s Operation Murambatsvina demolition of informal housing and markets directly rendered 700,000 urban Zimbabweans homeless or unemployed. Fully 70 percent of the urban population may have lost shelter or employment. In addition, over 2 million (more than 15 percent of Zimbabwe’s population) are believed to have been indirectly affected from loss of customers, employees, or markets.³³ The government told those affected to “return to their rural origins,” even though most had no such home to which they could return. Indeed, many had initially become homeless when the government sanctioned the seizure of commercial farms.³⁴ Reports indicate that forced eviction continued into December 2006.

Zimbabwe, which once had one of the best health care systems in Africa, now has the world’s lowest life expectancy at less than 37 years—a drastic fall from the life expectancy of 62 years in 1990.³⁵ An

estimated 42,000 women died from childbirth in Zimbabwe in 2006, over 40 times the figure in the mid-1990s.³⁶ According to UNICEF, one in four children are orphans.³⁷ Zimbabwe also has a significant HIV/AIDS problem; the disease infects an estimated 18 percent of the population. Most Zimbabweans are unable to afford medical care or are unable to obtain medicines due to the lack of foreign exchange, strikes by doctors and nurses, and shrinking incomes.

In addition, the lack of resources has forced the government to abandon vital public services. Power is erratic in parts of the country due to strikes over pay and an inability to maintain generators. Harare’s sewage treatment plant broke down in January 2007, causing 50 percent of the city’s raw sewage to be dumped into the main reservoir. As a result, cases of cholera are rising.³⁸

Perhaps most telling is the fact that over 3 million Zimbabweans—a quarter of Zimbabwe’s entire population and a majority of the working age population—have chosen to flee the country for neighboring South Africa, Botswana, Zambia, and Mozambique.³⁹ This refugee population is equivalent to the number that have fled the Darfur region of Sudan and is actually much higher as a percentage of the population. It has also imposed a substantial burden on the other countries in the region. Botswana has built a fence along the border in order to stem the flow of Zimbabweans and tightened border checks on people seeking to enter Botswana.⁴⁰ South Africa has been struggling to

30. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

31. U.S. Agency for International Development, “Zimbabwe: Food Security Update,” Famine Early Warning Systems Network, January 2007, at www.fews.net/centers/innerSections.aspx?f=zw&pageID=monthliesDoc&m=1002281.

32. Meldrum, “Zimbabwe is broke and hungry.”

33. Ploch, pp. 15–20.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 15–20.

35. “Key facts about Zimbabwe’s crisis,” Reuters, March 14, 2007, at www.zimbabwejournalists.com/story.php?art_id=1944&cat=2.

36. James Kirchick, “A Real Refugee Problem,” *The New York Sun*, February 26, 2007, at

37. Meldrum, “Zimbabwe is broke and hungry.”

38. Meldrum, “Zimbabwe heads for economic meltdown.”

39. Reuters, “Key facts about Zimbabwe’s crisis.”

40. Reuters, “Botswana tightens border after Zimbabwe tension,” March 19, 2007, at www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L19488886.htm.

cope with an estimated 3 million Zimbabweans believed to be in the country and deported an average of 12,000 Zimbabweans per month in 2006.⁴¹

Recommendations. The situation in Zimbabwe ranks among the world's worst government-created humanitarian disasters. Tragically for the Zimbabweans still in the country and those who have been forced to flee, the world has failed to give the situation as much attention as it has to other crises. As noted by the *Financial Times*:

The persistence of the crisis has dulled international senses to the looming danger that it could yet get far worse. South African and other regional leaders remain reluctant to weigh into issues that Mr Mugabe has cleverly manipulated around race. And there are signs in Europe of weakening resolve to isolate his regime. The United Nations has itself dropped attempts at promoting a more orderly post-Mugabe transition. It is time to end the hand-wringing and start constructing incentives for change.⁴²

Recent media attention following the assault and arrest of opposition party leaders has shaken this complacency and focused the world's attention on Zimbabwe. The U.S. should take advantage of this moment to increase pressure on Mugabe.

Strengthen and Expand U.S. Sanctions. The U.S. has been strongly critical of the Mugabe regime. For instance, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called Zimbabwe an "outpost of tyranny" during her confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.⁴³ The U.S. has suspended all non-humanitarian aid to Zimbabwe in response to

Mugabe's repressive policies, but the U.S. does provide food aid and disaster relief, HIV/AIDS funds, and assistance for democracy promotion.⁴⁴ It is a legitimate question whether these funds can achieve their objective while Mugabe is in power—a key example being the allegations of politicized distribution of food aid. The U.S. should reconsider all assistance to Zimbabwe that is open to manipulation or distribution by the government.

The U.S. has also imposed targeted sanctions against top Zimbabwean officials and "those who formulate, implement, or benefit from policies that undermine or injure Zimbabwe's democratic institutions or impede the transition to a multi-party democracy" since 2002 and prohibits the sale of military items and services to Zimbabwe.⁴⁵ Since 2003, the U.S. has added to the list of Zimbabwean individuals and entities whose assets owned or held in the U.S. are frozen by executive order; currently the list includes 128 individuals and 33 entities.⁴⁶ President Bush extended these sanctions and restrictions for a year on March 1, 2007, explaining:

I took this action to deal with the unusual and extraordinary threat to the foreign policy of the United States constituted by the actions and policies of certain members of the Government of Zimbabwe and other persons to undermine Zimbabwe's democratic processes or institutions. These actions have contributed to the deliberate breakdown in the rule of law in Zimbabwe, politically motivated violence and intimidation, and political and economic instability in the southern African region.⁴⁷

41. Ploch, summary and p. 34.

42. Editorial, "Crunch in Zimbabwe," *Financial Times*, February 14 2007, p. 14.

43. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, "Opening Remarks by Secretary of State-Designate Dr. Condoleezza Rice," Senate Foreign Relations Committee, January 18, 2005, at www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/40991.htm.

44. Ploch, summary and pp. 29-30.

45. President George W. Bush, "Zimbabwe Proclamation," The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, March 4, 2002, www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=61821.

46. President George W. Bush, "Executive Order: Blocking Property of Additional Persons Undermining Democratic Process or Institutions in Zimbabwe," The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, November 23, 2005, at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/11/20051123-4.html. Annex available at www.treas.gov/offices/enforcement/ofac/legal/eo/13391.pdf.

47. President George W. Bush, "Notice: Continuation of the National Emergency with Respect to Zimbabwe," The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, March 1, 2007, at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/03/20070301-2.html.

Following the crackdown on MDC leaders, State Department spokesman Tom Casey indicated that the U.S. was considering additional sanctions. One way to enhance the targeted sanctions would be to apply the travel ban, which currently extends only to spouses, to the families of Mugabe and others subject to existing sanctions and to extend the restrictions to more individuals in the Zimbabwean government. Another option is to adjust current sanctions, which permit U.S. importers and exporters to trade with Zimbabwe on most goods, to prohibit trade with Zimbabwe on selected items that benefit Mugabe, his associates, or his policies. Unilateral trade sanctions are usually ineffective but can send an important political signal.

Push for Stronger International Sanctions. Although the European Union has a travel ban and asset freeze in place on 125 Zimbabweans, Britain has announced that it plans to urge other EU members to adopt stronger sanctions on the Mugabe regime. According to Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett, “The Zimbabwean Government’s continued brutal treatment of the opposition and recent actions show its total disregard for international law and the will of the international community.... We must look urgently at ramping up the pressure on these individuals.”⁴⁸ The U.S. should support this effort.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have suspended lending to Zimbabwe for non-payment of arrears. The U.S. should oppose any effort to reinstate Zimbabwe as long as Mugabe remains in power.

The U.S. and the U.K. should also seek travel restrictions and other sanctions on Mugabe and his supporters in the United Nations Security Council. South Africa, which currently serves as president of the Security Council, rejected the possibility of con-

sidering the situation in Zimbabwe in the Security Council. According to the South African Ambassador to the United Nations Dumisani Khumalo, “We truly regret what’s happening in Zimbabwe, but it’s not the matter that belongs to the Security Council.”⁴⁹ But the U.K. takes over the presidency in April and the U.S. assumes the presidency in May. Both countries should use this position to place the situation in Zimbabwe on the Council’s agenda.⁵⁰

British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett announced on March 14 that the U.K. wants “the United Nations Human Rights Council to look into the situation in Zimbabwe urgently, and will be pushing for this in the coming days.”⁵¹ Hopefully, such action will take the form of a resolution condemning the government’s abuses or a special session focusing on the situation in Zimbabwe. Such an action would signal that, despite its profoundly disappointing performance thus far, the Human Rights Council can overcome its weaknesses to address human rights crises.⁵² The U.S. should support efforts to have the U.N. Human Rights Council take up the human rights violations occurring in Zimbabwe.

Press African Nations to Condemn Mugabe. Mugabe has been under severe criticism for years, mostly from Western countries, for mismanagement of his country’s economy and human rights violations. However, this pressure has had little effect without support from Zimbabwe’s neighbors. Indeed, Mugabe routinely rejects such criticism as “imperialist” or “colonial” intervention in Zimbabwe’s affairs—a message that resonates in Africa.

Criticism also has had little influence in the United Nations, which is dominated by regional voting blocks and groups like the Non-Aligned Movement and the G-77. These groups often act to

48. Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett, “Beckett Condemns Opposition Treatment in Zimbabwe,” U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, March 14, 2007, at www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029391638&a=KArticle&aid=1173561419745.

49. “Zimbabwe crisis haunts SA in New York,” SABC News, March 14, 2007, at www.sabcnews.co.za/africa/southern_africa/0,2172,145390,00.html.

50. ZimNews, “Zimbabwe crisis haunts SA in New York,” March 15, 2007, at www.zwnews.com/issuefull.cfm?ArticleID=16245.

51. Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett, “Beckett Condemns Opposition Treatment in Zimbabwe.”

52. See Brett D. Schaefer, “The U.N. Human Rights Council Does Not Merit U.S. Membership,” Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 1392, March 12, 2007, at www.heritage.org/Research/WorldwideFreedom/wm1392.cfm.

protect their members from scrutiny. Even countries from Latin America and Asia are unlikely to support resolutions condemning Mugabe or Zimbabwe unless some African countries sign on. Support from African nations, which usually support one another in international forums, is critical if proposals to apply pressure from the United Nations and other international institutions are to move forward. Without support from some African countries, efforts to condemn Zimbabwe in the U.N. General Assembly's Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural), the Human Rights Council, and other international bodies will likely fail.

In the past, African nations have demonstrated little interest in confronting Mugabe, who enjoys continent-wide respect as an elder statesman. The African approach is best illustrated by South Africa's "quiet diplomacy" initiative aimed at resolving the problems in Zimbabwe through negotiations and dialogue between the MDC and the government. South Africa continues to champion this initiative despite its ineffectiveness. There are signs, however, that patience among African nations is eroding after the latest crack-downs. In reaction to the arrests and beatings of MDC leaders, South Africa urged the "Zimbabwean government to ensure that the rule of law including respect for rights of all Zimbabweans and leaders of various political parties is respected."⁵³ Ghanaian President John Kufuor, who holds the rotating chairmanship of the African Union, was more critical, calling the situation in Zimbabwe "very embarrassing" and stating that the African Union was doing all it could to help.⁵⁴

The U.S. should work with individual African nations and the African Union to prevent reflexive support for Zimbabwe and help them recognize the necessity of holding Mugabe and his supporters accountable for the suffering of Zimbabweans.

Prepare for a Post-Mugabe Transition. President Mugabe's current term in office expires in 2008. Mugabe is reluctant to leave office and recently proposed extending his current term to 2010 or even running for another six-year term in 2008. However, support for Mugabe in Zimbabwe and within his own party is declining rapidly, and several influential ZANU-PF party officials are jockeying for the presidency.⁵⁵ There are indications of unrest among the broader population and within the armed forces, the police, and ZANU-PF. This raises the possibility of Mugabe's ouster.⁵⁶ Even if Mugabe is able to remain in office, he is an elderly man of more than 80 years and will eventually expire.

While the end of Mugabe's reign is long overdue, it will be no guarantee that his successor will prove more willing to support multi-party democracy or abandon the repressive economic and political policies that have led Zimbabwe into its current crisis. Mugabe's ouster or death could precipitate a chaotic period of instability with dire consequences for Southern Africa. The U.S. needs to have a plan in place to assist the transition of Zimbabwe to the post-Mugabe era. The first principle of such a strategy is a public statement that the U.S. will not recognize any successor to Mugabe unless he or she is the choice of the Zimbabwean people in a free and fair democratic election that permits participation by citizens living outside of the country. Any transition authority promising to facilitate such elections should be granted limited time to accomplish this goal, and the removal of sanctions and restrictions should be made contingent upon following through with steps toward a free election and the adoption of economic reforms necessary to alleviate the crisis. The U.S. should offer to assist this process financially and logistically. The U.S. should appropriate funds now so that they are available when needed to address instability in Zimbabwe and assist in the

53. South African Government Information, "South African government on the current situation in Zimbabwe," South African Department of Foreign Affairs, March 13, 2007, at www.info.gov.za/speeches/2007/07031409451001.htm.

54. Associated Press, "African Union chairman calls situation in Zimbabwe 'embarrassing'," March 14, 2007, at www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/03/15/europe/EU-GEN-Zimbabwe-World-View.php.

55. Ploch, pp. 9–10.

56. "Zimbabwe bishop ready to face guns," CNN, March 22, 2007, at www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/africa/03/22/zimbabwe.thursday/index.html.

process of reintegrating refugees. It should also enter into discussions with Zimbabwe's neighbors to develop a coordinated strategy.

Conclusion. For nearly a decade, President Robert Mugabe has abused his authority to maintain his brutal stranglehold on power. He has bankrupted and ruined one of the most robust economies in sub-Saharan Africa. Political and economic repression under Mugabe have precipitated a humanitarian crisis that rivals the genocide in Darfur. While the United States has adopted targeted sanctions and pressed for the U.N. and the African Union to confront the ongoing crisis, little progress has been made.

But now attacks on opposition party leaders have focused international attention on the situa-

tion. The U.S. should seize this opportunity to strengthen sanctions against Zimbabwe, press for condemnation of the situation in Zimbabwe by the United Nations and the African Union, and achieve the adoption of international sanctions targeted at Mugabe and his political supporters in the Security Council. The U.S. should also begin to develop a plan to assist the transition of Zimbabwe to the post-Mugabe era to minimize the chaos and negative consequences for the region and the people of Zimbabwe.

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