



Eighth Report
from the
Foreign Affairs Committee
Zimbabwe

Session 2002–2003

Response of the Secretary of State for
Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

*Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
by Command of Her Majesty
July 2003*

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
ZIMBABWE
EIGHTH REPORT OF SESSION 2002–03**

**RESPONSE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS**

Introduction

1. The Government welcomes the report of the Foreign Affairs Committee on Zimbabwe. We agree that the political, economic and humanitarian situation there has deteriorated since the Committee's last report in July 2002.

The Government assures the Committee that finding a solution to the crisis in Zimbabwe remains a priority that has not been obscured by other foreign policy preoccupations.

Recommendations

(a) We conclude that Mugabe's regime may indeed be in its last throes, although we do not underestimate its determination to cling to power. We recommend that the Government ensure that it is in a position swiftly to restore good working relations with any incoming administration that demonstrates a real commitment to restoring the rights, welfare and dignity of the people of Zimbabwe. (Paragraph 7)

The Government shares the Committee's conclusion.

We have made it clear that we stand ready to work with any new administration in Zimbabwe which has been democratically elected by the Zimbabwean people in a process that is transparent and demonstrably free and fair, and which is committed to respecting human rights and the rule of law. Contingency planning is already underway, with our EU partners, to position the Government to respond quickly and positively to the return of democratic government. With the rest of the international community, including International Financial Institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, we will help a democratically accountable Zimbabwe with a reconstruction package aimed at turning its economy around. The IMF has already made it clear that it is ready to re-engage as soon as Zimbabwe has a government which adopts sound macro-economic policies. ZANU (PF) does not have such policies, the absence of which has led to the IMF's decision to suspend Zimbabwe's voting and administrative rights.

(b) We recommend that the Government ensure that the policy which it supports, of refusing to operate through Zimbabwean governmental organisations or other official channels, is not subverted by inappropriate relationships with organisations closely associated with ZANU-PF. (Paragraph 14)

The Government is confident that international humanitarian assistance to Zimbabwe does not go through ZANU (PF) channels, but is tightly controlled and monitored by the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) and distributed via independent non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The UN, through the WFP, has fully investigated all accusations of Zimbabwe Government interference in the delivery of international humanitarian assistance. On occasions when abuses have been detected, the NGOs concerned have taken immediate action to suspend further assistance while the problems were discussed and investigated, with assistance from the UN as necessary. Such action has been successful in halting attempts by local political activists to interfere with food distribution arrangements. All complaints are examined, and when justified, put right wherever possible. We draw the Committee's attention to the Report of the International Development Select Committee on the Humanitarian Crisis in Southern Africa (March 2003), which applauded UK and international aid efforts in the face of political interference.

We would be happy to investigate if there is any specific information relating to our bilateral food programmes which gives cause for concern. The Department for International Development continues to monitor closely the distribution of humanitarian aid inside Zimbabwe, to ensure that it is allocated on the basis of need alone.

(c) We recommend that the Government prepare and publish a detailed dossier on human rights in Zimbabwe. (Paragraph 18)

The Government remains extremely concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation in Zimbabwe. We have made our views known, in Parliament and most recently in association with EU statements issued before and after the week of mass action organised by the opposition MDC (2-6 June). The FCO's annual report on global human rights includes a section on Zimbabwe, and our High Commissioner contributes to EU Heads of Mission reports on human rights there. (See recommendation d).

The Government has looked closely at this recommendation. We do not believe there is a case for the Government itself to prepare a report on the human rights situation in Zimbabwe. Many reputable specialist organisations, both Zimbabwean and international, already publish such material. They include Amnesty International; The International Crisis Group; Physicians for Human Rights – Denmark; The Solidarity Peace Trust; the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe; The Amani Trust; The Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition; Human Rights Watch and The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum. The facts, therefore, are widely available. Even the US Government report, issued in March in support of the EU's resolution on Zimbabwe at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR), drew on some of these sources.

The Government is also concerned that if it produced a report on human rights, it would risk undermining the work of some of these organisations. Any report, to be comprehensive, would need to quote from their findings. ZANU (PF) would seize on this as 'evidence' that such organisations are working for the British Government. They already operate in a difficult enough environment, without such entirely false accusations hanging over them.

We believe that a British Government report would therefore shed little new light on human rights abuses in Zimbabwe and would risk undermining the very valuable work being done by independent organisations. We nevertheless take every opportunity to shine a spotlight on the abuses taking place in Zimbabwe. Steve Crawshaw, the Director of Human Rights Watch, said on Radio Four in June that he "very much approved" of the British Government highlighting human rights abuses in Zimbabwe.

- (d) We recommend that in its response to this Report the Government bring the Committee up to date on progress towards publication by the EU of a document on human rights in Zimbabwe. (Paragraph 19)**

EU Heads of Mission (HOMS) regularly meet in Harare. Such meetings frequently include discussion of the human rights situation in Zimbabwe. HOMS regularly report on this issue to EU capitals, via the Africa Working Group in Brussels. These reports are not public documents. The Committee could apply to the EU for the release of these reports, but should note that the EU's Annual Report on Human Rights for 2002 is on the European Council's web site, (<http://ue.eu.int/pressdata/en/misc/73020.pdf>). Any other EU report, based on reports from NGOs and civil society, would duplicate information already in the public domain.

Human rights abuses in Zimbabwe are subject to close scrutiny from local and international NGOs. It is right that they, rather than Governments or the EU, should lead on this work.

- (e) We recommend that the Government take a positive decision to provide technical and financial assistance to the independent media in Zimbabwe, in consultation with representatives of those media. (Paragraph 21)**

The Government already provides political and moral support to the independent media of Zimbabwe. But we would need to think very carefully before giving technical or financial assistance. Doing so would inevitably lay such media open to the charge of being the unofficial mouthpiece of the British Government. They are not, although ZANU (PF) and the State-controlled press regularly make such allegations. But support in the way that the report suggests would be used by ZANU (PF) to compromise the independent media.

- (f) We recommend that the FCO – on its own, with other relevant Government Departments, or through the European Union – consider carefully the case for offering appropriate support to independent broadcasters operating from outside Zimbabwe. (Paragraph 22)**

The Government does consider this issue, and has held discussions with other potential donors about it. We have already written to the Committee on this issue (on 1 April).

- (g) We recommend that the Government take steps to strip Robert Mugabe of all honours, decorations and privileges bestowed on him by the United Kingdom. (Paragraph 25)**

The Government has made it clear that removing Mugabe's honorary knighthood, conferred on him in 1994, on the recommendation of the previous government, is not our immediate priority. We may revisit this question in the future.

- (h) We recommend that the Government explain in its response to this Report exactly how Interpol came to honour Chihuri, and how it now proposes to persuade Interpol to remove the honour (paragraph 26).**

The Government was not involved in Interpol's decision to make this appointment, and is not in a position to explain Interpol's decision-making procedure in this case. No

British representative was involved in this decision. We did, however, lead EU protests about it.

The Government welcomes the announcement that Mr Chihuri stepped down as Honorary Vice President of Interpol on 28 May.

- (i) We conclude that the French government's decision to invite Mugabe to attend a conference in Paris just one day after sanctions were due to elapse was a deeply regrettable and offensive act, which ran wholly counter to the convention that EU partners respect each other's interests in such cases, and which lent unwarranted credibility to the ZANU – PF regime. (Paragraph 30)**

The Government agrees that the French government's decision to invite Mugabe to their France/Africa Summit in February was wholly regrettable and was contrary to the spirit of the EU's Common Position on Zimbabwe. We made our objections clear to the French Government at the time. So did several other EU partners.

- (j) We recommend that in its response to this Report the Government set out in full the objections raised by other EU member states to a strengthening of sanctions against Zimbabwe, state by state. (Paragraph 31)**

Discussions between Member States in the Council are held in confidence.

- (k) Because of their likely adverse impact on the Zimbabwean people as a whole, we would not yet advocate the introduction of trade sanctions against Zimbabwe, other than the arms embargo which is already in place, but we recommend that, in its response to this Report, the Government set out its policy on the imposition of bilateral, non-trade sanctions against ZANU-PF, in addition to those imposed by the European Union. (Paragraph 32)**

The Government agrees that trade sanctions would only serve to damage the Zimbabwean people, while having little impact on the ZANU (PF) leadership. The Government believes that sanctions are far more effective when implemented multilaterally. It is for this reason that we have sought to work with our EU and Commonwealth partners wherever possible. This does not mean that we will never act unilaterally. When necessary, we have taken unilateral action, as we did when we imposed an arms embargo on Zimbabwe in May 2000, two years ahead of the EU. But we judge that further bilateral sanctions at this time would only boost ZANU (PF)'s false claim that the root of Zimbabwe's problems is a bilateral dispute with the UK; when the truth is that the root problem is one of governance, which causes concern to the entire international community. We will, however, keep our sanctions policy under careful review.

- (l) We conclude that for Zimbabwe to be readmitted to the Councils of the Commonwealth without a very substantial and verifiable improvement in its human rights record and major steps to re-establish democracy would be a travesty of the Harare principles and a betrayal of all that the Commonwealth stands for. We recommend that the Government continue to seek a consensus in the period leading up to the December heads of government meeting, but that it resist any compromise which does not require full compliance by Zimbabwe with the 2002 Marlborough House Statement. (Paragraph 36)**

The Government agrees with the Committee's conclusion. The question of Zimbabwe's possible re-admission to the Commonwealth's Councils will be discussed by Heads of State and Government at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Abuja in December. The Government will not accept the re-admission of a Zimbabwe that continues to breach the Harare Principles and the Marlborough House Declaration.

- (m) We recommend that the Government consult informally with other members of the Security Council and with African countries with a view to raising in the Council ZANU-PF's persecution of its political opponents, its use of torture, beatings, rape and starvation against its own people, and the threat which it poses to the prosperity and stability of southern Africa, as a matter of grave concern to the region and to the international community. (Paragraph 42)**

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) is the main UN forum for addressing human rights issues. At the past two sessions the EU has, with our strong support, tabled a resolution on Zimbabwe at UNCHR, only for it to be blocked by a 'no action' motion. The Government regularly discusses Zimbabwe with other Security Council members, but it is clear that the majority do not yet see Zimbabwe as a threat to regional peace and security.

- (n) We recommend that in its response to this Report the Government set out its policy on the use of an international force to supervise the distribution of aid and, in the longer term, to assist Zimbabwe's transition from dictatorship to democracy. (Paragraph 43)**

The Government does not consider that the use of an international force is necessary to supervise the distribution of donor funded food aid inside Zimbabwe. Nor do the NGOs who distribute the aid. As stated in response to recommendation (b), we are confident that international food aid going into Zimbabwe is being adequately monitored to ensure that it is distributed on the basis of need alone, and is not being used by ZANU (PF) in support of its political objectives. The Executive Director of the World Food Programme, James Morris, has met Mr Mugabe on a number of occasions and has offered UN assistance in monitoring the distribution of Government of Zimbabwe food programmes in Zimbabwe. The Government of Zimbabwe has not taken up his offer.

- (o) We conclude that if Zimbabwe's neighbours were fully to assume their responsibilities – for example, by imposing targeted non-trade sanctions similar to those already imposed by the EU, by some Commonwealth countries and by the United States - Mugabe's regime would be further isolated, his opponents would be encouraged and his days would be numbered. We further conclude that the Government would be entirely right to accept such a step, if it is taken, as evidence of the intention of the countries concerned to adhere to the principles to which they have committed themselves under NePAD and other international agreements, qualifying them to receive the benefits of those programmes. We recommend that Ministers take every opportunity to make this point clear to their counterparts in southern Africa. (Paragraph 48)**

The Government fully agrees. We make this point in our regular dialogue with Zimbabwe's neighbours and other African states.



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