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*Dear James,*

I visited Zimbabwe on 14-16th February, a country on which I had previously worked when in government with Presidents Mbeki and Zuma to try to improve relations. While there I was fortunate enough to be hosted by our Ambassador Catriona Laing who is working to improve relations between our countries, and ultimately to transform the country's economic and political situation.

After what was a very thought-provoking trip I wanted to pass on my main impressions.

Above all I was struck by the country's many natural advantages, and as such struck by the potential for a significant positive change in Zimbabwe, but also the tragedy of its current situation. The country has a substantial and under-explored natural resource endowment, an attractive environment and good climate, reasonable infrastructure - albeit now showing signs of decay - relative peace and stability, and an important regional location. I was told that the record on human rights is gradually improving (albeit with setbacks and erratic progress), and that the country's institutions remain in reasonable shape. Above all, everyone we met impressed on us the importance and potential of the country's well-educated, skilled and hard-working people, including a large diaspora (3m compared to population of 13m) many of whom are keen to return.

Any discussion of business - or indeed most aspects of life - was inevitably a discussion of politics and the intense speculation and manoeuvring over the succession to President Mugabe is dominating. It is clear that an endgame is underway, and the battle is being vociferously played out in the Zimbabwean press. Less clear is how it will end and who will prevail - and whether it will play out while the president is still alive.

From my discussions it appears that there are now broadly two ways in which it may play out, each with a corresponding political faction: