

The Zimbabwe Situation Report
The Zimbabwe Paradox

18 June 2007

Dear family and friends,

It has been three months since we last communicated to you all as to how we are doing here in Zimbabwe and also to provide you with firsthand accounts of the increasingly deteriorating situation in the country.

In a gathering of the members of the Zimbabwe Maryknoll Mission Presence on June 16-17, we acknowledged that while we still see faint glimmers of hope in the eyes of those we encounter, the daily struggles for survival are continuing to overwhelm and overburden Zimbabweans. We strongly feel that the disturbing impact of the deteriorating economic and political situation needs to be communicated.

Basic Services

Because of the dire economic situation, many governmental services and programs have either slowed or ceased. Extended power and water cuts are increasingly common across the country, with some people in urban areas without electricity or water for weeks while others only have it for 3 hours in the middle of the night. These irregularities cause severe disruptions in the daily routine of people's lives such as the need to rise at odd hours of the night to laundry, cooking, and bathing.

Environmental Impact

The lack of electricity has had a great impact on the environment as urban dwellers are rapidly deforesting their surroundings in order to cook over fire. No reseeded programs are in place.

Educational Impact

School fees continue to rise beyond what is affordable. Teachers are leaving the country at an alarming rate, seeking just compensation elsewhere. This compels students to attend and prepare for exams without access to proper instruction or textbooks.

Veterinary Services

Government veterinary services have all but ceased due to lack of fuel and the high price of medications. This impacts greatly on the many Zimbabweans whose livelihood is dependent on the chickens, rabbits, goats, and cattle they raise.

Inflation

Prices are doubling on a weekly basis, making basic commodities unaffordable. A loaf of bread now costs a quarter of a gardener's monthly salary. Six loaves of bread would eat away one half of a secondary schoolteacher's monthly salary.

Fuel and Pollution

Fuel continues to be in short supply and also expensive. People are therefore forced to buy adulterated fuel at lower prices, which impacts air quality. The irony of fuel shortages coupled with air pollution points to larger issues of mismanagement of funds and programs designed to monitor environmental standards, as well as the political and personal will to rectify the situation.

Corruption

Due to normalized and legalized corruption, as well as the informal diamond trade, those in positions of power are continuing to benefit from the economic situation. We are disturbed by the paradox that while many cannot afford basic busfare to and from work and other such essential travel, we continue to see brand new Mercedes, Lexus, BMWs, and Humvees on the potholed streets.

Violence and Rumours

On the political side, we live in a world of unverifiable rumours, the most recent being a failed coup. What we do know to be true and of great concern is the increase in politically motivated violence, torture, intimidation, detentions, and disappearances. With the presidential elections slated for March 2008, it is predicted that this violence will intensify as we approach that time.

Bishops' Pastoral Letter

The Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops issued a pastoral letter on Holy Thursday titled, "God hears the cries of the oppressed." This document is an honest portrayal of the socio-economic-political crisis in Zimbabwe and appeals to the government to abide by its mandate to care for the people. The result has been a negative response from the government in the form of direct and veiled threats to ministers of the church, some arrests, and ongoing harassment from government intelligence agents.

Conclusion

The rapid deterioration of so many interdependent aspects of society is alarming. The major impact is felt by the ordinary workers, civil servants, the elderly, orphaned children, and those needing medical attention. We continue to hope for signs of positive change and pray for those impacted. Please keep Zimbabwe in your thoughts and prayers. While positive change is certain, the journey is bound to be turbulent and challenging.

In peace and hope,

The Zimbabwe Maryknoll Mission Presence

Sisters Chiyong Pak, Jeongmi Lee, Kathi Barbee, Fran Kobets, Janice McLaughlin and lay missionary Merwyn DeMello and his wife, Kirstin Rothrock

P.S. Please continue to refer to www.zimbabwesituation.com for daily reports. Another good source of news is www.zwnews.com