

Testimony for U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Africa

“Exploring U.S. Policy Options toward Zimbabwe’s Transition:  
The Case for Engagement”

Donald Steinberg, Deputy President  
International Crisis Group  
September 30, 2009

Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank you and ranking member Senator Isakson for bringing us together today to explore policy options toward the transition in Zimbabwe, and for your continuing leadership on these issues.

As an international non-governmental organization committed to preventing and ending deadly conflict, International Crisis Group believes that Zimbabwe now has its best chance in a decade to put behind it the divisions, abuses, and self-implosion that has been the legacy of the abusive regime of Robert Mugabe. The combination of an inclusive government, a re-emerging and vibrant civil society, an educated population and work force, a once-rich manufacturing, agricultural and mining sector waiting for recovery; and the good will of countries in its region and beyond can open the door to a post-conflict recovery that would benefit both its long-suffering people and the broader southern African region.

But for all the hopeful possibilities inherent in this situation, a “wait-and-see” attitude from the international community, including the United States, risks creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of a return to conflict and repression.

MDC’s Entry into Government

When Morgan Tsvangirai led his party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), into a unity government with Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU-PF) in February 2009 under the terms of the Global Political Accord, sceptics gave the new formation little chance of success. Tsvangirai and the MDC were portrayed as neophytes who would soon become the latest victims of Mugabe’s “divide, rule, co-opt and destroy” strategy. It was broadly understood that the MDC position was driven by a pragmatic assessment of their options. Mugabe and his hard-line allies and security forces held most of the cards: a monopoly on force, a willingness to repress and abuse its political opponents, and the obsequious support of South African President Thabo Mbeki, charged by the Southern African Development Community to negotiate a solution to the long-standing electoral and political crisis. The MDC calculated that its capacity to affect change would be greater within government than outside it.

Understandably repulsed by the autocratic actions, human rights abuses, and corrupt practices of Mugabe and his coterie, foreign donors – including the United States – have held back on support to the new government in which they maintain the upper hand. The original approach of providing only narrowly defined humanitarian assistance was

eventually modified to a position described as “humanitarian-plus,” and included support for not only life-saving emergency projects, but also for agricultural recovery, civil servants involved in relief exercises, and health and educational institutions. This approach was seen as balancing a desire to improve the lot of Zimbabwe’s population with continuing pressure on the actors in the new government – especially Mugabe and ZANU-PF – to meet their commitments toward a transition to democracy governance.

Against long odds, the new government started out reasonably well. Many schools and hospitals re-opened. The Zimbabwe dollar, which had been turned into an international joke by multi-billion percent inflation, was shelved. Civil servants were paid a small stipend and returned to work; goods started to return to empty store shelves; a cholera epidemic was brought under control; and a bipartisan parliamentary committee was formed to reform the constitution. Human rights activists reported a significant drop in government abuses.

An ambitious reconstruction program – the Short-Term Economic Recovery Programme – identified the need for about \$8.5 billion in resources, including foreign assistance and investment, and was generally well-received by foreign donors and the Bretton Woods institutions. Prime Minister Tsvangirai, Finance Minister Tendai Biti and their MDC party received much of the credit for these developments – even from the rank-and-file army – and a new sense of hope returned to Zimbabwe.

But Tsvangirai could see clearly that these changes were fragile and pleaded for foreign help to consolidate them. “Don’t make us pay for working with Mugabe,” he wrote in a powerful opinion piece in the *London Times*.

Indeed, from early on, there were ample signs of concern. Farm seizures have continued virtually unabated. While human rights abuses declined, ZANU-PF-led security forces have continued to arrest and detain activists and MDC parliamentarians. Hard-line partisans like the Reserve Bank Governor Gideon Gono and the Attorney General Johannes Tomana were unduly reappointed, top generals boycotted the new national security establishments and showed public disdain for Tsvangirai, and ZANU-PF has delayed or ignored key commitments under the Global Political Accord (GPA). The constitutional reform process has been thwarted by ZANU-PF’s insistence that the secretly-authored Kariba draft serve as the basis for a new constitution.

Some old regime elements, especially hard-line generals and other Mugabe loyalists, are actively thwarting the new government, motivated by fear of a loss of power and its financial benefits; possible prosecution for their crimes; hatred of Tsvangirai and the MDC; and a belief that that they are the guardians of the country’s liberation. These forces continue to work flat out to undermine the inclusive government by stalling processes that should lead to the fulfilment of the GPA and refusing to implement government decisions. True to form, Mugabe is giving them backing, calling into grave question his commitment to make the inclusive government work.

## The Risks of International Disengagement

During his visit to the United States and Europe this summer, Tsvangirai was met with luke-warm encouragement, much skepticism, and very little cash. In addition to the revulsion over supporting a government including Mugabe, Zimbabwe's timing was awful. It was seeking massive foreign aid and private investment at a time when donors were cutting aid budgets and foreign investors were seeking safe havens in the stormy global economy. Tellingly, no one has called for a "Marshall Plan for Zimbabwe."

In fact, this stance risks thwarting the very changes the international community is seeking, both by weakening the hand of the MDC and moderates in ZANU-PF, and by undercutting popular support for the reform process. The humanitarian situation remains dire, with reluctant donors pledging less than half of the \$718 million required to ward off disease and hunger. The United Nations and non-governmental organizations have warned of a potential new cholera outbreak ahead of the rainy season. Moreover, doctors and teachers have gone on strike to demand better pay. The government is unable to buy grain from farmers because the Grain Marketing Board has no money. The constitutional reform process is stalled in part over the failure of the government to finance outreach and consultation programs.

Already, there are disturbing warnings that the MDC is losing contact with its popular base, including in the context of the constitutional reform process. Civil society activists are increasingly complaining that this process is being driven by political elites for their own purposes. Similar arguments are emerging with regard to efforts to develop mechanisms to hold the perpetrators of human rights abuses accountable for their actions. Within the MDC itself, some question the wisdom of remaining in the unity government.

Further, despite succession battles within ZANU-PF between the rival factions of the hard-line Defense Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa and the more moderate General Solomon Mujuru and his wife, Vice President Joice Mujuru, the forces committed to Mugabe seem to be firmly in control.

## Maintain Targeted Sanctions; Enhance Targeted Assistance

Mr. Chairman, the United States must stand firmly against those who are thwarting the democratic transformation in Zimbabwe. Tough targeted sanctions – including trade and travel bans and assets freezes – against such individuals and the companies they control under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, the National Emergencies Act, and section 301 of title 3 of the U.S. Code should remain in place to secure the commitment of the recalcitrant parties to their commitments under the GPA.

But at the same time, targeted reconstruction and development assistance – channeled through fully transparent, credible and accountable mechanisms and institutions – is essential now. Such mechanisms do exist: the International Monetary Fund, for example, has ensured responsible use of the one-time expansion of special drawing rights to Zimbabwe equivalent to a \$500 million loan for the purpose of building and repairing

schools, hospitals, roads, railways and communication networks. The United States, other donors, and international financial institutions should:

- o Expand assistance to support revival of the education, agriculture, water, health and water sanitation, including support for the soon-to-be-announced Government Works Program. Particular attention should be given to programs to assist women, including reproductive health care and girls' education.
- o Help empower a functioning civil service and legislature, and support reform of politicized government institutions, including the judiciary.
- o Strengthen civil society – groups of women, academics, journalists, lawyers, farmers, and others – fractured and polarized in recent years by Mugabe's divide-and-rule tactics.
- o Adopt innovative programs to encourage new trade and foreign investment in Zimbabwe to address the country's massive unemployment rate and promote the return of four million Zimbabwean migrants who are increasingly the target of xenophobic attacks in South Africa and elsewhere in the region.

#### America's Interests in Zimbabwe's Recovery

Mr. Chairman. At a time when crises in Afghanistan, Burma, Congo, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Pakistan, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Sudan fill the in-boxes of American policy-makers, it would be easy to move the slow-simmering crisis to the back-burner. Neither the MDC nor ZANU-PF consorts with global terrorists, and collapse of the unity government will not lead to jihadi training camps in rural areas. Zimbabwe is neither a supplier nor a major trafficker in illegal drugs, arms or persons. Its refugees are not flooding into the United States. Zimbabwe has no oil, and most of its minerals face free-falling global demand. No exotic diseases threaten pandemic: it suffers from "just" cholera, malaria and HIV/AIDS. The country straddles no sea lanes and has no pirates.

But there are strong motivations for broad American engagement. Just because the global effects of Zimbabwe's implosion have so far been modest, this could change rapidly. Transnational threats incubate in unexpected ways in the hothouse of instability and weak governance. What if the H1N1 virus had emerged in Harare and swept through a country where the health infrastructure had been ravaged?

Zimbabwe's recovery is of major regional importance. If Zimbabwe is a smallish country of 12 million people, the southern African region – with a market of 200 million, growing oil production, peacekeepers throughout Africa, and a location along key shipping lanes – is by contrast of great strategic, commercial and political importance to the United States. A prosperous Zimbabwe could be an engine of growth for the region, providing key links to regional communications, transport and electricity grids. Zimbabwe has long been considered a potential breadbasket for the region, based on what used to be efficient agriculture, albeit needing serious and responsible land reform.

By contrast, instability in Zimbabwe is profoundly destabilizing to its neighbors. An estimated four million Zimbabweans fleeing economic hardship and political abuses have flooded across borders, overwhelming the social services and the good will of South Africa, Botswana, and other neighbors. Botswana, Africa's shining star of stability and human rights, has built an electrified fence and resorted to detention and expulsions to keep desperate Zimbabweans out.

This regional importance has been one reason why the SADC has been advocating greater international support for the unity government. South Africa itself has put up about \$75 million to support the process of democratic transformation. During his visit to Harare in late August and a subsequent meeting Secretary of State Clinton, South African President Jacob Zuma gave welcome indications that he will press a tougher stance vis-à-vis Mugabe on outstanding GPA obligations, respect for rule of law, and cessation of repressive actions by the security forces under his control.

But regrettably, the international community cannot rely solely on Zimbabwe's neighbors to promote this process. As shown again in their September 7-8 meeting in Kinshasa, many SADC leaders continue to kowtow to Mugabe. Following a presentation in which he told these leaders that the unity government is doing well, SADC unproductively called for the lifting of targeted international sanctions on Zimbabwe and cancelled an extraordinary summit on Zimbabwe to review the weak implementation of the GPA.

Working with regional actors, the broader international community and, of course, the Zimbabwean people themselves, the United States has a unique opportunity to promote democratic transformation and socio-economic recovery in Zimbabwe.

I know that some worry that such a strategy would prematurely reward Mugabe and his hard-line supporters, or somehow reduce the pressure on them to cooperate with the reform process.

In truth, a policy of engagement and targeted assistance through credible and transparent channels would strengthen the hands of moderates and make it more difficult for the extremists to again seize power, which would result in even greater repression and isolation for Zimbabwe's people and greater instability throughout South African and beyond. Put simply: we believe that if you want to sideline Mugabe and his hard-liners, you should support the people of Zimbabwe by embracing the unity government now. Thank you.

#### Grants from the U.S. Government

International Crisis Group was approved September 30, 2007 for a USAID grant to support a program of Conflict Prevention and Containment (USAID grant #DFD-G-00-07-00252). For the current fiscal year, we have so far received \$78,624.94 on November 17, 2008; \$84,681.48 on February 13, 2009; \$219,617.35 on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009; and \$118,087.79 on August 14, 2009.