



Africa Action Statement on the Crisis in Zimbabwe

December 10, 2007

On Human Rights Day, Africa Action, the oldest Africa advocacy organization in the U.S., expresses its commitment to stand in solidarity with the people of Zimbabwe who in the midst of extreme political violence are working for democracy, human security and social justice.

Africa Action and its predecessors have a long history of solidarity with the people of Zimbabwe. In the 1970's and 80's this commitment manifested itself in political and material support for the independence movement and opposition to U.S. government policies that supported white minority rule. Today, Africa Action works to deepen our ties with a range of progressive civil society organizations that continue to struggle for democracy and human rights.

Skyrocketing inflation, massive unemployment, and widespread poverty have left the population desperate for change. The U.S. and other western governments have fueled today's political and economic crisis from independence onwards. Shortly after independence, the U.S. and the UK failed to fulfill pledges to finance land reform and address inequalities. In the 1990's, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, dominated by western governments, pushed Zimbabwe to accept structural adjustment policies that undermined social programs and stalled economic progress. Structural adjustment drove down the standard of living for most Zimbabweans and set the stage for the current challenges. As a result, civil society has been wary of western intervention, for fear that it carries with it a secondary agenda of promoting a neo-liberalism in Zimbabwe that would not protect Zimbabweans' right to health, education and social welfare.

Earlier this year a violent crackdown against political opposition in Zimbabwe sparked international outrage. Thus far this year there are over 6,000 cases of human rights abuses. A recent example was the November 22nd beating of 22 members of a pro-democracy civil society organization. The political repression in Zimbabwe stands in direct contradiction to the principles that were the cornerstone of that country's liberation struggle. Africa Action's commitment to human rights rises above any historic connection to individuals, parties or governments. Unfortunately, the U.S. and international community has not held human rights with such high regard, as evidenced when allegations of grave atrocities in Matabeleland were ignored by Western governments that were more committed to supporting Zimbabwe's implementation of structural adjustment economic policies than protecting the people of the country.

The U.S. currently has sanctions on Zimbabwe that include travel bans and financial sanctions against individuals in the Mugabe regime. The U.S. has recently announced a widening of these sanctions to include more individuals, and the U.S. and the international community have at

times discussed more comprehensive sanctions if things do not change. Civil society organizations in Zimbabwe have not come out with a clear call in favor or in opposition to sanctions. Africa Action, therefore, urges the international community to develop a strategy that will address the roots of Zimbabwe's political and economic crisis and mediate a democratic solution. The reality, however, is that the U.S. has lost credibility with Zimbabwe's people, and a high profile U.S. role in addressing the crisis risk further backfiring and being used by the government to fuel its position at the expense of its citizens. Accordingly, Africa Action does not recommend U.S. leadership in this international response at this time.

Instead, this diplomatic initiative must include African states, regional bodies, international actors that have credibility in Zimbabwe and the various stakeholders within the country. This international effort must take new and extraordinary steps to support civil society in Zimbabwe in their efforts to end the political crisis, to facilitate a transition to a more broad-based government and to promote peace, social justice and human rights. It must mediate the crisis and facilitate an all inclusive dialogue process between the government, opposition and civic society, developing a national conversation that would define the country's future. This process should include a plan to facilitate Mugabe's exit and develop a new rights-based constitution, culminating in free, fair, transparent and democratic elections.

Africa Action stands in solidarity with progressive civil society in Zimbabwe to challenge counterproductive U.S. policy and work towards international action that can augment domestic efforts to protect human rights while building a new Zimbabwe that embodies and enacts the values underpinning its historic liberation struggle.