



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe – ZWE36818 – Foreign contacts
– USA – Welfare agencies – NGOs –
Sanctions
21 June 2010

1. Are there any reports of Zimbabweans having been targeted by ZANU-PF members or others due to links with the US?

No specific reports were found of Zimbabweans being targeted by members of ZANU-PF or others due to their links with the United States. However, a number of sources highlight the possible ill-treatment of returnees at the hands of the government and ZANU-PF, due to their perceived foreign links and the assumption that they may be spies for the British government.

In October 2009, *SW Radio Africa* reported the concerns of Zimbabwean nationals living in the UK and facing possible deportation. Sarah Harland from a Zimbabwean asylum-seeker charity in the UK claims that “the present precarious situation in Zimbabwe meant there is increased anxiety about returning home. In the past few weeks there have been increasing incidents of violence and intimidation against NGOs, rights activists and MDC supporters, and there are widespread fears of more attacks as the political crisis unravels”. As examples, Harland cites a returning teacher who was harassed and punished “merely for being away in the UK”, and a man who was murdered by ZANU-PF youths following his return to Zimbabwe from the UK “for being a ‘sell-out’”.¹

Similarly, a *BBC News* article describes a 2005 test case in which the UK’s Asylum and Immigration Tribunal (AIT) ruled that a Zimbabwean asylum-seeker could not be deported by the government even though he had no valid claim to asylum when he arrived in the UK, on the grounds that “he could face a risk of real harm if sent back – because it was clear that Zimbabwean security services believed returning asylum seekers were British spies”.² Another *BBC News* article dated 6 October 2005 discusses the same case, explaining that the tribunal heard warnings from lawyers that “Zimbabweans deported home are regarded as traitors or spies by Robert Mugabe’s government”. It is argued that the Zimbabwe government believes the returning asylum-seekers are being sent back as agents of an international campaign to encourage regime change in Zimbabwe. Investigations showed that the so-called “spies” or “agents of regime change” faced “in-depth questioning” by Zimbabwe’s Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) upon their return.³

In addition, an article in *The African Executive* in June 2008 highlighted the government’s view that the weak Zimbabwean economy is “a victim of the West”, a view which has encouraged the development of policies “geared towards countering foreign threats including ‘threats’ from Zimbabweans abroad, who are seen as working against the ruling

¹ ‘Concern Raised as UK Threatens Deportations’ 2009, AllAfrica Global Media, source: *SW Radio Africa*, 31 October – Attachment 1

² ‘Q and A: Zimbabwe asylum ruling’ 2006, *BBC News*, 11 April
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4901202.stm – Accessed 4 November 2009 – Attachment 2

³ ‘Zimbabwe returnees regarded spies’ 2005, *BBC News*, 6 October
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4315122.stm – Accessed 7 September 2009 – Attachment 3

party”.⁴ Similarly, a *Reuters* article dated 20 July 2008 identifies the government’s opinion that “sabotage” by Western “enemies”, including the imposition of sanctions, is to blame for the economic crisis in Zimbabwe.⁵ A news article dated 9 June 2010 cites a study by the South African Institute of Security Studies, which found that “the imposition of measures by western nations has actually assisted Zanu (PF) to win support from those opposed to US and European policies in general...Mugabe has cunningly turned the whole sanctions issue into what he regards as an anti-imperialist crusade – portraying himself as a victim of western imperialist forces...[and] has persistently and viciously attacked anyone who supports the targeted measures as a ‘puppet of the West’”.⁶

In order to counter the potential withdrawal of foreign investment under the Western-imposed sanctions on Zimbabwe, Mugabe began targeting foreign-owned companies for takeover by local investors and firms from “friendly” countries such as those in the Far East.⁷ These takeovers are evident in a March 2009 news article which reports a spate of violent invasions of foreign-owned farms by ZANU-PF groups, supported by soldiers and the police.⁸ It is therefore reasonable to expect that people who have links to countries such as the US could be perceived to be supporting the sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe by Western countries.

Another example of the Mugabe government’s perception of foreign threats to his rule is the exclusion of the United States, along with member states of the European Union and the Commonwealth, from monitoring and observing the March 2008 general elections. During this period, Mugabe continued to accuse the West of financing the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party and encouraging regime change.⁹ Mugabe similarly warned against foreign influence in Zimbabwe during the signing of the power-sharing deal between ZANU-PF and the MDC following the March 2008 elections.¹⁰ Furthermore, a 2007 news article emphasises Mugabe’s view of British and American governments, who he accuses of being “imperialists [who] are taking advantage of the ruling ZANU-PF party succession to reassert themselves” by cutting deals with leaders in Zimbabwe such as Morgan Tsvangirai, head of the MDC.¹¹

⁴ Kundishora, H. 2008, ‘Zimbabwe Must not Persecute its Diaspora’, *The African Executive*, 11-18 June <http://www.africanexecutive.com/modules/magazine/articles.php?article=3211#> – Accessed 30 October 2009 – Attachment 4

⁵ Chinaka, C. 2008, ‘Mugabe threatens to seize foreign firms over sanctions’, *Reuters*, 20 July <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL2061476520080720> – Accessed 21 June 2010 – Attachment 5

⁶ ‘Zimbabwe: ‘Sanctions’ backfire says thinktank’ 2010, ReliefWeb website, source: The Zimbabwean, 9 June <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/KHII-86A3VR?OpenDocument&RSS20=02-P> – Accessed 21 June 2010 – Attachment 6

⁷ Chinaka, C. 2008, ‘Mugabe threatens to seize foreign firms over sanctions’, *Reuters*, 20 July <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL2061476520080720> – Accessed 21 June 2010 – Attachment 5

⁸ Nyathi, K. 2009, ‘Zimbabwe: Zanu PF Sabotaging Inclusive Government’, AllAfrica Global Media, source: *The Standard*, 21 March <http://allafrica.com/stories/200903220008.html> – Accessed 18 June 2010 – Attachment 7

⁹ ‘Western monitors barred from Zimbabwe poll: Govt’ 2008, *ABC*, 8 March <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/03/08/2183972.htm> – Accessed 10 June 2010 – Attachment 8

¹⁰ ‘Prime Minister Tsvangirai calls on Zimbabwe parties to ‘unite’’ 2008, The Zimbabwe Situation website, source: Yahoo News, 15 September http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/sep16_2008.html – Accessed 10 June 2010 – Attachment 9; ‘Zimbabwe rivals sign power pact’ 2008, *The Australian*, 16 September <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/zimbabwe-rivals-sign-power-pact/story-e6frg6uf-111117494917> – Accessed 10 June 2010 – Attachment 10

¹¹ ‘Mugabe threatens to expel Western diplomats’ 2007, *ABC*, 17 March <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2007/03/17/1874149.htm> – Accessed 10 June 2010 – Attachment 11

2. In particular, are there any reports of people involved in welfare work having been targeted for links to foreign countries?

No reports were found of individuals involved in welfare work being targeted due to their links to foreign countries. However, a number of sources suggest that the operations of organisations involved in humanitarian work in Zimbabwe have been restricted by the ZANU-PF party.

The human rights report on Zimbabwe released by the US Department of State in March 2010 highlights continuing governmental interference with the activities of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who are perceived to be supporting the opposition. In particular, government-controlled media was used to dismiss “the efforts and recommendations of NGOs that were considered critical of the government as efforts by groups that merely did the bidding of ‘Western governments’”. ZANU-PF supporters and members of the security forces were backed by the government in intimidating and harassing organisations believed to have links to the opposition, including international and foreign NGOs.¹²

The activities of all aid agencies involved in humanitarian operations in Zimbabwe, including the United Nations, NGOs, and private voluntary organisations, were banned for an extended period of time in 2008, forcing such organisations to shut down their field operations.¹³ A 2008 news article explains that teachers and aid workers were warned by the government to suspend their field work to avoid being “seen as meddling in the nation’s affairs”. Teachers in particular were singled out by an unsigned editorial in government controlled newspaper *The Herald*, which, due to their role in the disputed March 2008 elections as poll monitors, identified them “as part of an elaborate British- and American-financed plot to rig the election and get rid of Mr. Mugabe”.¹⁴

Another news article from 2008 similarly reports bans on the activities of international aid organisations Care International and Plan International in Manicaland. The groups have been accused by the Mugabe government of “using aid to campaign for the opposition”, and were blamed for Robert Mugabe’s poor election results in the provinces of Manicaland and Masvingo. An official in the Mugabe government stated that “our information indicates that NGOs are involved in plans to undermine our candidate”.¹⁵

In addition, a 2004 news article describes a contentious law supported by the ZANU-PF party which aimed to “restrict foreign funding of human rights groups” by imposing “strict controls on all forms of private associations and charities, including churches, and bans the receipt of foreign funding without state approval”. The law supports the party’s position that “[n]o organisation with foreign links is permitted to deal with ‘issues of governance or rights’”. Mugabe is said to have “repeatedly accused Western-funded charities and rights groups of siding with his opponents”.¹⁶ Although it is unclear whether

¹² US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009: Zimbabwe*, 11 March, Sections 2b, 5 – Attachment 12

¹³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) 2010, *Education Under Attack*, UNESCO website, p.241 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001868/186809e.pdf> – Accessed 9 June 2010 – Attachment 13; ‘Government bans all foreign aid’ 2008, Zimbabwe Today website, 6 June

<http://www.zimbabwetoday.co.uk/2008/06/government-bans.html> – Accessed 9 June 2010 – Attachment 14

¹⁴ Dugger, C. W. 2008, ‘Violence in Zimbabwe Disrupts Schools and Aid’, *The New York Times*, 8 May <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/08/world/africa/08zimbabwe.html> – Accessed 9 June 2010 – Attachment 15

¹⁵ Kandi, T. 2008, ‘Mugabe bans aid group from feeding villagers’, *ZimOnline*, 3 June

<http://www.zimonline.co.za/Article.aspx?ArticleId=3249> – Accessed 18 June 2010 – Attachment 16

¹⁶ ‘Zimbabwe moves to pass contentious law’ 2004, *Mail & Guardian Online*, 24 November

<http://www.mg.co.za/printformat/single/2004-11-24-zimbabwe-moves-to-pass-contentious-law> – Accessed 10 June 2010 – Attachment 17

this law was enacted, the proposal is indicative of the ZANU-PF party's perception that groups with foreign links are supporters of their political opponents.

Attachments

1. 'Concern Raised as UK Threatens Deportations' 2009, *All Africa*, source: SW Radio Africa, 31 October. (FACTIVA)
2. 'Q and A: Zimbabwe asylum ruling' 2006, *BBC News*, 11 April
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4901202.stm – Accessed 4 November 2009.
3. 'Zimbabwe returnees regarded spies' 2005, *BBC News*, 6 October
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4. Kundishora, H. 2008, 'Zimbabwe Must not Persecute its Diaspora', *The African Executive*, 11-18 June
<http://www.africanexecutive.com/modules/magazine/articles.php?article=3211#> – Accessed 30 October 2009.
5. Chinaka, C. 2008, 'Mugabe threatens to seize foreign firms over sanctions', *Reuters*, 20 July
<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL2061476520080720> – Accessed 21 June 2010.
6. 'Zimbabwe: 'Sanctions' backfire says thinktank' 2010, ReliefWeb website, source: The Zimbabwean, 9 June
<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/KHII-86A3VR?OpenDocument&RSS20=02-P> – Accessed 21 June 2010.
7. Nyathi, K. 2009, 'Zimbabwe: Zanu PF Sabotaging Inclusive Government', AllAfrica Global Media, source: *The Standard*, 21 March
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8. 'Western monitors barred from Zimbabwe poll: Govt' 2008, *ABC*, 8 March
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9. 'Prime Minister Tsvangirai calls on Zimbabwe parties to 'unite'' 2008, The Zimbabwe Situation website, source: Yahoo News, 15 September
http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/sep16_2008.html – Accessed 10 June 2010.
10. 'Zimbabwe rivals sign power pact' 2008, *The Australian*, 16 September
<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/zimbabwe-rivals-sign-power-pact/story-e6frg6uf-1111117494917> – Accessed 10 June 2010.
11. 'Mugabe threatens to expel Western diplomats' 2007, *ABC*, 17 March
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2007/03/17/1874149.htm> – Accessed 10 June 2010.
12. US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009: Zimbabwe*, 11 March.
13. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) 2010, *Education Under Attack*, UNESCO website
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001868/186809e.pdf> – Accessed 9 June 2010.
14. 'Government bans all foreign aid' 2008, Zimbabwe Today website, 6 June
<http://www.zimbabwetoday.co.uk/2008/06/government-bans.html> – Accessed 9 June 2010.

15. Dugger, C. W. 2008, 'Violence in Zimbabwe Disrupts Schools and Aid', *The New York Times*, 8 May <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/08/world/africa/08zimbabwe.html> – Accessed 9 June 2010.
16. Kandi, T. 2008, 'Mugabe bans aid group from feeding villagers', *ZimOnline*, 3 June <http://www.zimonline.co.za/Article.aspx?ArticleId=3249> – Accessed 18 June 2010.
17. 'Zimbabwe moves to pass contentious law' 2004, *Mail & Guardian Online*, 24 November <http://www.mg.co.za/printformat/single/2004-11-24-zimbabwe-moves-to-pass-contentious-law> – Accessed 10 June 2010.