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BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

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Summary of Report

Political Developments

Zimbabwe given back IMF voting rights after seven years

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has agreed to restore Zimbabwe's voting rights after a seven-year suspension for unpaid debts.

Malawi: NGOs question AU chairman

The Human Rights Consultative Committee (HRCC), a civil society network of 91 NGOs in Malawi working to promote governance, accountability, and human rights has questioned the government provision of MK500 million (about 2,314,814 Euros) to president Bingu wa Mutharika as administration costs of chairing the African Union (AU).

AU gives Madagascar leader sanctions deadline

Madagascar's leader must comply with previous power-sharing agreements by March 16 or the African Union will impose targeted sanctions the following day, the AU said on Friday.

African Union gives Madagascar sanctions ultimatum

The African Union gave Madagascar's diplomatically isolated leader an ultimatum on Friday, saying he will face sanctions if previous power-sharing agreements are not in place by March 16.

FACTBOX-Main players in Madagascar's political crisis

Madagascar must comply with previous power-sharing agreements by March 16 or the African Union will impose sanctions.

IMF restores Zimbabwe voting rights

International Monetary Fund member countries agreed unanimously on Friday to restore Zimbabwe's voting rights after a seven-year suspension, a step toward normalizing relations with major donors.

Zimbabwe's President Criticizes EU Sanctions Extension

Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe says the extension of sanctions by the European Union is punishment for his land-reform program.

Zimbabwe: EU to Endorse Decision to Extend Targeted Sanctions by Another Year

The European Union's council of ministers will meet in Brussels, Belgium on Tuesday to endorse a proposal to extend the sanctions against Zimbabwe until 20 February 2011.

Zimbabwe: Govt, Iran to Strengthen Ties

Zimbabwe and Iran share similar historical and cultural experiences that should be pooled together for the prosperity of the two countries, the Islamic Republic's Embassy in Harare has said.

Mozambique: EU Observers Give Final Verdict on Elections

Giving its final report on Mozambique's general and provincial elections held on 28 October, the European Union Observation Mission on Tuesday praised the organisation of the polling, but condemned serious incidents of fraud, notably the significant number of polling stations that claimed an impossibly high turnout.

South Africa: Joint Military Exercises for SA, Germany

A German task force arrived at the Simon's Town naval base yesterday for a month-long exercise with the South African National Defence Force (SANDF).

Economic Developments

SA economy 'to grow 2.3% in 2010'

The South African government expects the country's economy to grow by 2.3% this year, helped by the football World Cup in the summer.

Zimbabwe's Mugabe in diamond export threat

Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe has threatened to quit the Kimberley Process (KP) - the body which ensures diamonds do not fund conflicts.

Malawi dials 4th cell

Malawi has launched an international tender for a fourth cell-phone operator, in a bid to reduce tariff rates that are among the highest in Southern Africa.

SOUTHERN AFRICA: Women Traders Demand Support

At the workshop, cross border traders declared 2010 to be the year they are going to fight for regional government to acknowledge their contribution. And like any other entrepreneurs, women cross border traders want to see their businesses flourish and expand.

Zimbabwean Ministers Urge Exiled Businessmen to Return Home

Zimbabwe's two home affairs (Interior) ministers earlier this month told a gathering of successful Zimbabwean businessmen in Johannesburg that the government of President Robert Mugabe and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai wants them to return to help revive the economy.

Botswana: Govt Agree to Spend P1 Billion on De Beers Debt

The cash-strapped government of Botswana has agreed to spend US \$150 million (P1 billion) in helping to cut De Beers' debts which currently stand at \$3 billion.

Mozambique: Five Year Licences for Private Water Suppliers

Private water suppliers in Maputo and the neighbouring city of Matola seem to have won their demand for five year licences.

Namibia: Petrol Price Up Again

FUEL prices increase on Wednesday for the first time in the new year, when 95 octane unleaded petrol goes up by 20 cents per litre, while the price of 93 octane lead replacement petrol (LRP) rises by 17 cents per litre and diesel by 7,0 cents a litre.

South Africa: Business Still in the Dark Over Implications of Emissions Pledges

The government has reconfirmed its commitment to reducing its emissions trajectory - but business still has little detail on what it will be asked to do.

South Africa: Rand Weakens After Chinese Bank Move

THE rand weakened after China toughened bank regulations aimed at reducing loan growth, raising concern that the measures would cool the world's fastest-growing economy and reduce demand for commodities.

Zambia: 'Mfezs Good for Economy'

Commerce, Trade and Industry Permanent Secretary Buleti Nsemukila has said multi-facility economic zones (MFEZs) are the faster way of adding value to local products.

Zimbabwe: 1,000 Delegates Expected for Investment Summit

More than 1 000 local and international delegates converge in Harare today for the 5th Pan African Tourism Investment Summit and the International Conference on Investment Opportunities in Tourism and Related Sectors.

Zimbabwe: EU Hands Over Trucks to ZFU

The European Union last Friday handed over 11 trucks to the Zimbabwe Farmers Union.

Zimbabwe: Investment Conference Offers Opportunities

This week, Zimbabwe will host another international investment conference, and this time she will be focusing on tourism.

Zimbabwe: SA Company Introduces Portable Housing System

A South African company, Thazade Light Steel Construction, has introduced a new housing concept of foldable and portable units in Zimbabwe that is suitable for the country's disaster-prone areas.

Botswana: Germans Eye Country's Energy and Water Sectors

A 22 member business delegation from Germany is in the country to explore investment opportunities in various sectors of the economy mainly mining and energy.

Zimbabwe: Resources Key to Development – President

Officially opening the Pan-African Tourism Investment Conference in Harare yesterday, the President Mugabe said Africa had the capacity to lead global development. Africa's diverse natural and cultural resources are key to the continent's development.

Social Developments

ZIMBABWE: "Small House, Big House" showing soon on TV

A new Zimbabwean short film on multiple concurrent sexual partnerships (MCPs) runs for just 24 minutes, but the producers are hoping that its message will last much longer.

The film, "Big House, Small House" is the latest offering from the One Love Campaign, which works to reduce HIV prevalence and MCPs in 10 southern African countries.

South Africa: Experts in the art of generating poverty

Due to rising unemployment and earnings inequality most average black people have been revealed to earn less, and the government seems clueless to deal with this crisis.

Zambia: Housing affordability

Accommodation in Zambia is so expensive the majority is opting to stay in substandard houses that cannot accommodate all their family members.

Zimbabwe state employees march against low pay

Zimbabwe government workers marched through the capital on Friday, saying they were scaling up a job boycott against low wages, in a sign of growing impatience with the country's year-old unity government.

Malawians Debate Legalizing Gay Marriage

In late December, two gay men held an engagement ceremony – and were promptly arrested. The event prompted a public debate over the legalization of homosexuality.

POLITICS-MAURITIUS: Plea for More Female Candidates

In Malawi, there is very less number of females who are in the politics. Political parties are overwhelmingly dominated by males. So, Women's rights organisations want political parties to nominate one female candidate for every three candidates in the next election.

EU's Hedegaard to embark on climate diplomacy tour

The European Union's new climate chief, Connie Hedegaard, will soon embark on a climate diplomacy tour to reinvigorate global negotiations after the weak outcome of talks in Copenhagen in December.

UNAIDS chief begins visit to Southern Africa with stop in Swaziland

UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé has begun his visit to Southern Africa with a two-day stop in Swaziland to see first-hand the progress and challenges in fighting the spread of HIV/AIDS in a country where the infection rate is 26 per cent.

Angola: Optimism On Results of Human Rights Report

The Angolan delegation to the 7th session of the Universal Periodical Review (UPR), a UN human rights monitoring mechanism, is optimistic about the results of the debate on its report on the last development of human rights in Angola to be issued Tuesday.

Kenya: Bad Maize From SA to Be Destroyed

More than 30,000 bags of contaminated maize held by the National Cereals and Produce Board at its Embu depot will be destroyed on Friday.

Angola: Policies to Promote Citizenship Assured

The Ministry of Assistance and Social Welfare (MINARS) will consider as priorities during the third Republic, contributing with policies and programmes aimed at promoting citizenship in order to provide good living conditions to the needy.

Namibia: Are We Serious About Job Creation?

A Namibian citizen criticizes the Namibian government for not creating the jobs. He is of the view that Namibian government is not looking serious in job creation. It does not have effective policies and a conducive climate for business to thrive in and employ locals.

Mali frees al Qaeda prisoners in hostage swap – report

Mali authorities have released four Islamist prisoners in an apparent deal with al Qaeda's North African wing to save a French hostage, according to a Mali newspaper report.

South Africa: Africagate is No Scandal Say IPCC Authors

The latest 'Africagate' controversy and criticism over the use of 'grey literature' in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fourth Assessment Report does not undermine climate change science, say IPCC authors.

SOUTH AFRICA: Increase in Social Grants Will Benefit Children

South Africa's children, the country's most vulnerable population group, will benefit through the increase in social grants recently outlined in the national budget.

South Africa: Police Visibility Reduces Crime – Expert

Police visibility is a deterrent of crime, says a senior researcher at the Institute of Security Studies (ISS).

South Africa: Education Budget Gets R17 Billion Hike

Education continued to receive the lion's share of the country's budget with Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan on Wednesday announcing an allocation of R165 billion to the Basic Education and Higher Education departments for the next financial year.

Detailed Report

Political Developments

Zimbabwe given back IMF voting rights after seven years

(BBC News)

19 February 2010

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has agreed to restore Zimbabwe's voting rights after a seven-year suspension for unpaid debts.

But the fund said the country was still ineligible for loans until it had paid off more of the \$1.3bn (£841m) it owes to creditors.

In the meantime, Zimbabwe can take part in IMF decision-making.

The move recognises the country's efforts to repair its economy and improve relations with donors.

There are signs that the country's economy is improving a year after former foes President Robert Mugabe and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai united in a coalition government.

The IMF said it had taken the decision to restore Zimbabwe's voting rights after a request from the country's Finance Minister Tendai Biti.

The fund suspended Zimbabwe's voting rights in 2003 over disagreements with the previous government of Mr Mugabe.

The move comes just days after the European Union renewed sanctions against the country for another 12 months, citing lack of progress by the new unity government.

Malawi: NGOs question AU chairman

(Africa News)

15 February 2010

The Human Rights Consultative Committee (HRCC), a civil society network of 91 NGOs in Malawi working to promote governance, accountability, and human rights has questioned the government provision of MK500 million (about 2,314,814 Euros) to president Bingu wa Mutharika as administration costs of chairing the African Union (AU).

In a press statement, HRCC stated the fact that Malawi is now AU chair should not ignite excitement for unnecessary travel by government officials as the money is huge

considering that it will be spent within 5 months (February to June 2010). “Will the local tax payers bear the burden alone, or will other countries contribute? Of all 53 member states how much countries normally subsidize or contribute and how much is the AU budget for the chairman office?” read part of the release signed by the body’s Chairman, Undule Mwakasungula.

The body also questions why the money should be managed by the Ministry of Finance (MoF) when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) has the special AU desk which can ably manage the funding. “We don’t know why an additional MK 158 million (about 731 481 Euros) is appearing under the MoFA for increased international meetings under Malawi AU chairmanship. Why different figures under different votes coming in different direction?” reads the statement

Finance Minister Ken Kandodo Banda told the local media that the money will help the president, who is the AU chairman to ably participate in his work of uplifting the lives of Africans. Mutharika denied commenting on the issue when he was returning from the AU summit saying he was not briefed.

AU gives Madagascar leader sanctions deadline

(Alert Net)

19 Feb 2010

ADDIS ABABA, Feb 19 (Reuters) - Madagascar's leader must comply with previous power-sharing agreements by March 16 or the African Union will impose targeted sanctions the following day, the AU said on Friday.

"Sanctions will be effected as of the 17th of March unless, before the 16th of March, full compliance is displayed with the mediator in the implementation of the Moputu and Addis agreements," said Ramtane Lamamra, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security. (Reporting by Barry Malone; Editing by David Clarke/David Stamp)

African Union gives Madagascar sanctions ultimatum

(Alert Net)

19 Feb 2010

ADDIS ABABA, Feb 19 (Reuters) - The African Union gave Madagascar's diplomatically isolated leader an ultimatum on Friday, saying he will face sanctions if previous power-sharing agreements are not in place by March 16.

Since Andry Rajoelina seized power on the Indian Ocean island in a coup last March, international mediators, donor countries and opposition leaders have been pressing for a power-sharing government and a return to democracy.

Rajoelina agreed an initial power-sharing deal with three former presidents in Maputo, Mozambique, in August but they failed to strike a consensus on senior government positions.

An extension was signed in Ethiopia in November but there were instant disputes over the divisions of executive power and Rajoelina then snubbed the African Union's latest attempt to strike a compromise in January.

"Sanctions will be effected as of the 17th of March unless, before the 16th of March, full compliance is displayed with the mediator in the implementation of the Maputo and Addis agreements," Ramtane Lamamra, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, said after a meeting in Addis Ababa.

Rajoelina has formed a government unilaterally and promised parliamentary elections in May with a view to reforming the constitution and holding presidential elections.

TRAVEL BANS

Mull Sebuja Katende, chair of the AU Peace and Security Council, said mediation would continue under former Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano, but time was running out for the "de facto authorities in Madagascar".

"We will impose targeted sanctions according to the institutions we have. We have travel bans, we have economic sanctions, and all those that apply," he told reporters.

Some analysts say the island's heavy reliance on donor aid gives mediators a chance to drag Rajoelina back to talks. The United States severed preferential trade agreements last December and the European Union is considering a similar move.

Moderates in the government argue Rajoelina needs international support and stability to reboot the stagnant economy and soothe the fears of foreign investors, analysts say.

Overseas investment surged to around \$1.47 billion in 2008 from \$86 million in 2005 as companies including Rio Tinto <RIO.AX> <RIO.L> and Sherritt International <S.TO> poured money into the extraction and exploration of oil and minerals.

But the administration is split over the need to bow to the African Union and European Union.

This week, Rajoelina said he was not afraid of individual sanctions, but called on international bodies to spare the ordinary people from more economic hardship.

In a rare show of consensus, Marc Ravalomanana, the president Rajoelina ousted last March, urged the African Union a day later to avoid provoking a humanitarian crisis.

"I am deeply concerned that poorly targeted economic sanctions will cause additional suffering to my countrymen," he wrote in a letter to the AU's Peace and Security Council.

"I call on the African Union to ensure that any new sanctions are carefully targeted against the illegal regime." (Additional reporting and writing by David Clarke in Nairobi; Editing by Angus MacSwan)

FACTBOX-Main players in Madagascar's political crisis

(Alert Net)

19 Feb 2010

Feb 19 (Reuters) - Madagascar must comply with previous power-sharing agreements by March 16 or the African Union will impose sanctions. [ID:nLDE61I23B]

Below are some facts about the main players:

* ANDRY RAJOELINA:

-- President Andry Rajoelina, 35, seized power in March 2009 with the support of the military. Former President Marc Ravalomanana has accused the former disc jockey of being a puppet of France, Madagascar's former colonial power.

-- Under the old constitution, Rajoelina is five years too young to stand as a candidate in presidential elections.

-- Rajoelina contested municipal elections in 2007 as an independent, running against Ravalomanana's party. As mayor, he became one of the most ardent critics of Ravalomanana's government, labelling it a dictatorship.

* COLONEL CAMILLE VITAL

-- Colonel Vital, 57, played no role in Ravalomanana's overthrow. He was not previously considered close to Rajoelina but was appointed prime minister in December after the latest round of power-sharing talks collapsed.

-- He rose through the ranks during the leadership of former President Didier Ratsiraka. Born in July 1952, Col. Vital trained at Madagascar's military academy. From 2001-2002 he studied at the Ecole Supérieure Militaire in Paris.

-- Speaks excellent Russian, according to his official CV.

* MARC RAVALOMANANA:

-- President Marc Ravalomanana, 60, is a self-made dairy tycoon who was also mayor of the capital Antananarivo before becoming president.

-- Since he was ousted, Ravalomanana has lived in exile in South Africa. He was charged in absentia of abuse of office.

-- Ravalomanana was ruled the winner of the first round of a 2001 presidential election, but only took up the presidency in 2002 after incumbent Didier Ratsiraka gave up a violent struggle to keep power and fled. Ravalomanana was re-elected in 2006.

-- In his early 20s, he made yoghurt which he sold on the capital's streets. He owns the TIKO corporation which at one stage was the largest non-foreign owned firm on the island with a monopoly on all dairy and oil products sold locally.

* DIDIER RATSIRAKA:

-- Known as "Debba" or the "Admiral", Vice Admiral Didier Ratsiraka was president from 1975 to 1993 and 1997 to 2001.

-- Ratsiraka fled to Paris in mid-2002 after a disputed election plunged the country into turmoil. He was later tried and found guilty in absentia of stealing nearly \$8 million from the central bank before fleeing the country. He never appealed.

* ALBERT ZAFY:

-- International mediators gave Zafy's political career a new lease of life when he was called into power-sharing talks.

-- Zafy is leading calls for the opposition to form a unity government. He has urged the military to remain neutral.

-- Born in 1927, Zafy was president from March 1993 to September 1996. Accusations of corruption and abuse of office saw him impeached by the National Assembly -- a move upheld by the High Constitutional Court. (Writing by Richard Lough; Editing by David Clarke)

IMF restores Zimbabwe voting rights

(Alert Net)

20 Feb 2010

WASHINGTON, Feb 19 (Reuters) - International Monetary Fund member countries agreed unanimously on Friday to restore Zimbabwe's voting rights after a seven-year suspension, a step toward normalizing relations with major donors.

The IMF said, however, that Zimbabwe was not eligible for financial aid until it had cleared its arrears to the Fund and had a plan to pay off arrears to the World Bank and African Development Bank.

The arrears to the three institutions total about \$1.3 billion.

In an interview with Reuters, Zimbabwe Finance Minister Tendai Biti said key donors like the United States and Britain made strong statements of support for Zimbabwe during the IMF meeting but want to see more political and economic reforms.

"It's a major indicator that if we continue on the path of reform, on the path of stabilization, and policy consistencies, we can achieve full reintegration and full support," he said.

The IMF suspended Zimbabwe's voting rights in 2003 over policy differences with the previous government of President Robert Mugabe. Western donors withdraw crucial funding for the southern African country and blamed Mugabe's land reform policies and mismanagement for the collapse of the once prosperous economy.

Mugabe formed a unity government a year ago with former opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai, who is now prime minister. The IMF has said there are signs the economy is starting to recover due to improved policies.

'MEAGER RESOURCES'

Biti said that without addressing Zimbabwe's debt burden of close to \$6 billion, including to the Paris Club of creditor nations, the country would be unable to recover fully from more than a decade of economic decline.

In a country where 85 percent of the population lives below the poverty line and per-capita income is less than \$400, Biti said it would be "immoral to take any dollar of our meager resources" to pay off our debt.

"It is self-evident that we have to come to an understanding with the creditors and partners on our debt," he added.

But to win donor support for debt cancellation, Biti said Zimbabwe had to establish a track record of good economic and political decisions.

"(Donors) are preparing to support us but they are also rightfully raising certain issues that we have to deal with," Biti added.

Among those, he said, was a clear signal about the political direction of the country including the credibility of the political coalition, and progress in building a democratic state through agreement on a new constitution and strengthening the rule of law.

On the economy, he said donors wanted "clear signs that the economic stabilization work we have done is not a flash in the pan and is an irreversible commitment."

Biti said an IMF team would next visit Zimbabwe in early March. (Reporting by Lesley Wroughton; Editing by Peter Cooney)

Zimbabwe's President Criticizes EU Sanctions Extension

(Voice of America)

17 February 2010

Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe says the extension of sanctions by the European Union is punishment for his land-reform program.

Reacting to the European Union's announcement Tuesday that travel bans on him and ranking members of his party would be extended for 12 months, Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe said he was not at all surprised by the move. He said those who imposed the measures do not want any country in the developing world to make any meaningful developmental strides.

Mr. Mugabe told the media that Zimbabwe is a special case. "There is the issue of the land here which once upon a time they occupied and which we have repossessed," he said. "When they make those noises it is because they have lost that which they occupied illegally, which is now in our possession."

The European Union says the measures have been extended because of a lack of progress in the implementation of the agreement that brought about the national unity government, the so-called Global Political Agreement.

The measures, imposed in 2002 for alleged human rights abuses by the the previous Mugabe government have proved to be a stumbling block to the full implementation of the agreement. Mr. Mugabe's Zanu-PF party has said it will not make any more concessions until Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change calls for removal of the sanctions.

Mr. Mugabe disagreed that the recently announced law that requires foreign-owned companies to cede 51 percent of their companies to Zimbabweans would scare away badly needed investment from Zimbabwe. "Forty-nine percent is a hell lot of equity, its only foolish ones who will say so, wise ones will take it up," he said.

He also said while Zimbabwe is adhering to the regulations of the Kimberley Process with regards to the sale of diamonds from the controversial Chiadzwa diamond fields in eastern Zimbabwe, the country could go it alone and sell the diamonds, in his words, "our own way anywhere." Rights organizations have alleged widespread human-rights abuses against civilians by security forces in the diamond fields.

Zimbabwe: EU to Endorse Decision to Extend Targeted Sanctions by Another Year

SW Radio Africa (London)

15 February 2010

The European Union's council of ministers will meet in Brussels, Belgium on Tuesday to endorse a proposal to extend the sanctions against Zimbabwe until 20 February 2011.

The Committee of permanent representatives from the EU met last week and decided to extend the targeted sanctions against Robert Mugabe and his cronies. SW Radio Africa understands that this decision was motivated by the shortage of sufficient progress in the implementation of the Global Political Agreement between ZANU PF and the two MDC formations.

The EU imposed sanctions on 203 key ZANU PF and government figures allegedly involved in violence and human rights abuses and 40 companies associated with these individuals and their sources of finance.

Despite strong resistance from human rights defenders, the EU is likely to remove some names and companies from the sanctions list. There are divisions within the EU over the sanctions issue; some are calling for the lifting of embargoes on state firms, while others want targeted restrictions eased.

Gabriel Shumba, a lawyer and human rights activist told us the majority of EU countries were against the lifting of targeted sanctions against Zimbabwe. Shumba who was in Brussels last week said crucial benchmarks to move the country forward have yet to be met by Mugabe and his ZANU PF party.

"You can't reward them for stalling progress under the GPA. What have Mugabe or those on the list done in the last year to deserve being struck off the list?" said Shumba.

The EU set benchmarks for the inclusive government to meet if sanctions were to be lifted. Among them was the restoration of the rule of law, respect for human rights, media freedom and institutional reforms. But Mugabe has vowed he will not cede any further ground in negotiations with Tsvangirai's MDC until all sanctions against him and his cronies are lifted.

"The inclusive government is not working because the benchmarks set by the EU have not been met or pursued for that matter. Repressive laws are still there and human rights violations are still there; so why lift the sanctions," Shumba said.

He added; "Everywhere you go, the sentiments are the same; it is not the restrictions that are creating problems in the country but mismanagement, and not respecting of human rights."

Shumba argued that it was too early to remove sanctions because the levers of power were still very much in the hands of those on the sanctions list. All those on the list are banned from traveling to Europe, and their assets are frozen in European banks.

He said there was a likelihood that some individuals and companies would be removed from the list as the EU works by consensus, to appease other nations that are calling for the removal of the sanctions.

Last year, the EU and Australia removed Mavambo/Kusile/Dawn Project leader Simba Makoni from their lists of targeted individuals. Dumiso Dabengwa the leader of the revived ZAPU was also removed from the Australian list. There is speculation he will be one of the few individuals to be removed from the EU list on Tuesday.

Others names to be removed might be those of the late former Defence Forces Commander Vitalis Zvinvashe, and the late ZANU PF Minister without Portfolio and party Commissar, Elliot Manyika, who was killed in a car accident. He has already had his name struck off the Australian list.

Zimbabwe: Govt, Iran to Strengthen Ties

(The Herald)

15 February 2010

Harare — ZIMBABWE and Iran share similar historical and cultural experiences that should be pooled together for the prosperity of the two countries, the Islamic Republic's Embassy in Harare has said.

Head of the Cultural Centre of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran Mr Mohammad M. Assadi said this on Thursday during the commemorations of the 31st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution at a Harare hotel.

Mr Assadi said Iranians and Zimbabweans had a similar history of strong Western interference and continued interference even after independence.

"Zimbabweans have a very wonderful culture and history and they must not let that be taken away from them. They must not let their culture be bombarded by the Western culture, they must just stick to their culture," he said.

He said Zimbabweans must be wary of some Western backed locals like what Iran had seen in the Shah's regime, that was perceived by many as beholden to, if not a puppet of, the United States of America whose aim was to contaminate their culture.

He said Zimbabweans are very educated people and are very generous with amazing hospitality to their visitors and tourists.

"It is time we start exhibiting Zimbabwean artefacts in Iran and Iranian artefacts in Zimbabwe. God blessed Zimbabwe with beautiful tourist attractions and we are going to promote them in Iran," he said.

He said, "We all face negative publicity from the western countries and that must not discourage us from carrying out our respective missions.

"Our media must support each other as we are widely criticised by the western media," Mr Assadi said.

Also present at the commemorations was the Minister of Youth Development, Indigenisation and Empowerment Saviour Kasukuwere, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Zimbabwe Professor Levi Nyagura, and members of the diplomatic corps.

There were exhibitions of several Iranian items including books, clothing, food and drinks.

Mozambique: EU Observers Give Final Verdict on Elections

Agencia de Informacao de Mocambique (Maputo)

16 February 2010

Giving its final report on Mozambique's general and provincial elections held on 28 October, the European Union Observation Mission on Tuesday praised the organisation of the polling, but condemned serious incidents of fraud, notably the significant number of polling stations that claimed an impossibly high turnout.

The report, presented at a press conference by the head of the EU Mission, Fiona Hall, praised the orderly and calm manner in which voting took place. "Polling procedures in 88 per cent of polling stations visited by European Union observers were assessed as good or very good", it said. "Polling staff were committed, and overall they acted professionally in the polling stations visited".

But voting staff in several parts of the country stained this good record. The district of Mozambique Island, in Nampula province, was a particular headache - here the EU observers witnessed so many breaches of counting procedures, and even intimidation of voters, that they considered the island as "the district showing the most blatant patterns of violations across the board".

There were "clear signs of ballot box stuffing and large discrepancies between the number of votes cast for each of the three elections (i.e. presidential, parliamentary and provincial) in the same polling stations". There were also cases of polling station results "clearly modified between counting and the next day display outside the polling station".

The overall turnout in the general elections was only 44 per cent. Yet many dozens of polling stations claimed obviously fraudulent turnouts of 100 per cent or more. The EU observers found at least 95 such polling stations in Tete province, and 40 in Gaza.

The EU mission noted that "regarding the multiple cases observed of suspiciously high turnout, the National Elections Commission (CNE) did not show any intention of treating them as fraud". This is somewhat unfair, in that the CNE did throw out a large number of impossible results sheets, and refused to include them in the final results.

This was clear in the most corrupt of the districts, Changara in Tete province, where the CNE rejected the results from 51 of the 122 polling stations. But the CNE's work was not sufficiently thorough. AIM went through the remaining 71 stations, one by one, and found that not a single results sheet was credible.

The other significant fraud, admitted by the CNE, was the deliberate invalidation of ballot papers by dishonest polling staff, usually by adding an inky fingerprint to the paper, making it look as if the voters concerned had tried to vote for more than one candidate.

All the votes declared invalid at the polling stations were checked by the CNE in Maputo. Journalists and observers could watch this "re-qualification", which the EU observers regarded as "impartial and consistent".

Many of these ballot papers "showed clear signs of deliberate invalidation" - but since the papers were heaped together, usually by district, it was not possible to trace any particular ballot paper back to an individual polling station.

The EU mission found that in several districts, and in clear violation of the memorandum of understanding between the CNE and the EU, observers were not allowed to watch the

tabulation of the results sheets coming in from the polling stations. Even worse, they were excluded from provincial tabulation in Niassa, Cabo Delgado and Nampula.

The observers noted several cases of political party monitors being illegally excluded from polling station counts, and "as a consequence, many of these delegates could not file a complaint on irregularities". Additionally, the EU observers "witnessed multiple cases of polling station presidents refusing to register complaints about counting and tabulation from political party representatives".

Did these various instances of fraud or irregularities make any difference to the results? The overwhelming victory for Frelimo, taking around three quarters of the vote in both the presidential and the parliamentary elections suggests that they did not.

The EU report states that this Frelimo landslide "suggests that the results reflect the choice of a vast majority of Mozambican voters. This stems from Frelimo's well-planned and executed campaign, a considerable imbalance between its campaign expenditure and that of the two main opposition parties, Frelimo's foothold within local level administration, and the limited alternative choice for voters".

The report notes an improvement in the CNE's announcement of the results, which, unlike the 2004 elections, was a day earlier than the legal deadline. The cost of this, however, was carelessness in the CNE's mathematics.

The CNE's announcement of the results on 11 November "failed to provide accurate data", the EU report notes. Incorrect percentages were given, and conflicting figures, which had to be corrected later.

The EU mission recommended that Mozambican electoral legislation, which is currently scattered through several laws, "should be made internally consistent and consolidated into a single act". This should also include areas which are currently left up to regulations made on an ad-hoc basis by the CNE - in other words, the mission called for a reduction in the discretionary powers of the CNE.

To avoid any future misunderstanding, the mission suggested that all key provisions "should be clearly and unambiguously stated in the law, such as the procedures for candidate registration, and conditions for substitution of ineligible candidates".

The poor drafting of the current law meant that the CNE and several of the political parties had differing interpretations about exactly what documentation should be in candidates' nomination papers, and the deadlines for submitting it. This particularly penalised the Mozambique Democratic Movement (MDM) - nine of its 13 lists for the parliamentary constituencies were rejected because the CNE claimed the documentation was incomplete.

The EU report also proposes a shake-up in the way the CNE is formed. It suggested that all members of the CNE "should be appointed by a platform consisting of civil society organisations".

At one point in the lengthy negotiations over the electoral law in 2006, the Frelimo parliamentary group did suggest that all CNE members be drawn from civil society. This horrified the main opposition party, Renamo, which has always sought to exercise a veto on the CNE.

The eventual, unhappy compromise was that five of the 13 members of the CNE were appointed by the parliamentary political parties in proportion to the number of seats they hold

- which means three from Frelimo and two from Renamo. These five then chose the other eight from names submitted by civil society bodies. This procedure means that the two parties still exert excessive power over what is supposed to be an independent body.

The main risk of the current procedure is that talented figures from civil society, who happen to be outspoken and controversial, are unlikely to pass through the political party filter.

The EU recommendations also include extending the tenure of both the CNE and the appeals body, the Constitutional Council, for longer than the current five years "so that experience in managing elections is gained and lessons learnt pass from one process to another".

The current CNE has a better record on transparency than its predecessor in 2004 (which was in repeated conflict with observer missions). Nonetheless, the EU Report thought that more should be done "to improve the transparency of CNE operations at all levels". It suggested that the CNE "should develop a communication strategy including the prompt and complete publication of all decisions and internal procedures".

As for electoral malpractice, the report urged a much more serious approach. It suggested that the CNE itself, and its provincial and district election commissions "should receive complaints from political parties regarding irregularities during voting, counting and tabulation that have been refused at polling station level, without the need for a police report of the occurrence, thus allowing a proper and timely redress of any complaint received".

In addition, the report suggests that the CNE "should establish a database containing consolidated records of complaints received, responses and decisions taken at all levels of the electoral administration, so that the system is transparent and publicly accountable".

South Africa: Joint Military Exercises for SA, Germany

(BUSINESSDAY)

16 February 2010

Johannesburg — A GERMAN task force arrived at the Simon's Town naval base yesterday for a month-long exercise with the South African National Defence Force (SANDF).

The visit shows the growing strength of diplomatic ties between SA and Germany and also signals co-operation through joint preparation for future international military missions.

Lt Rachel Dulamo, spokesman for the naval base, said the collaboration has been code named Exercise Good Hope IV, being the fourth military exercise the two countries have conducted in SA's waters and airspace. Strategic military training and expertise is shared during these exercises.

"It is an important part of the close and trustful partnership that exists between Germany and SA ... the largest undertaken by the German Task Force Group outside of its Nato (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) obligations," Dulamo said.

The German task force is composed of elements of that country's navy and air force. The South African side will equally display a large-scale participation by the South African Air Force (SAAF) and the navy.

Dulamo said the theatre of operations will be around Cape Town with some exercises conducted at the Overberg Military Test Area near Bredasdorp, and at Arniston and Waenhuiskrans.

"Some of the types of exercises will include live missile and gun firings, antisubmarine warfare with mock torpedo attacks, anti-aircraft drills, fleet work and manoeuvring," he said.

The German Defence Force will be represented by two frigates, two combat support vessels, six tornado fighter bomber, one AN124 Antonov military carrier and two Lear Jets. The SANDF will be represented by two frigates, one submarine, one strike craft, two mine counter measures, two inshore patrol vessels. The SAAF will use the services of two Hawk fighter jet trainers, two Lynx and three Oryx helicopters.

The South Africa Navy said it hoped the exercise would enhance and maintain the defence capabilities of the two armed forces; develop a common understanding of operational intricacies of the military; and foster mutual trust, respect and co-operation between the German Task Force Group and the SANDF.

The exercise is also meant to upgrade "operational means and methods of multinational conventional forces" by employing different types of equipment while exercising according to a common set of principles.

Economic Developments

SA economy 'to grow 2.3% in 2010'

(BBC News)

17 February 2010

The South African government expects the country's economy to grow by 2.3% this year, helped by the football World Cup in the summer.

The prediction of a return to economic expansion after last year's recession was given by Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan as he delivered the budget.

He expects the World Cup to add 0.5% to the country's 2010 economic growth, led by visiting football fans' spending.

Mr Gordhan added there would be a new effort to boost youth employment.

The budget comes as South Africa is mired in an overall unemployment rate of about 25%, and an increasing gap between the rich and poor.

Mr Gordham said the government aimed to reduce its budget deficit in the medium term, but its immediate focus was on helping the continuing economic recovery.

He also pledged to maintain a grip on inflation, and said there would be no moves to fix the price of the rand.

Zimbabwe's Mugabe in diamond export threat

(BBC News)

17 February 2010

Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe has threatened to quit the Kimberley Process (KP) - the body which ensures diamonds do not fund conflicts.

"We can sell our diamonds our own way," Mr Mugabe said as he opened a trade and tourism fare in Harare.

The president and his allies have been accused of rights abuses in the eastern Marange diamond field.

The KP gave Zimbabwe until June to prove the Marange field was being properly run.

However, last month Zimbabwe cancelled a diamond sale after officials failed to get KP approval for the gems.

"We are trying to play their way, but we could go outside that KP system and do it otherwise," said Mr Mugabe.

Analysts say the only way open to Zimbabwe would be the black market. Activists have long accused the military of carrying out widespread atrocities in the Marange fields.

They say there is evidence of mass evictions, forced labour and murders by security forces.

They also claim that the profits from the stones go to Mr Mugabe and his allies, who joined a unity government a year ago.

They have always denied the allegations. Late last year, rights activists pressured the KP group to suspend Zimbabwe's membership.

But the group instead opted for a June deadline for the Marange fields to be cleaned up - a decision criticised as too lenient by rights groups.

Meanwhile, the president dismissed the European Union's decision on Tuesday to extend sanctions against Mr Mugabe and his inner circle for another year.

It said the coalition government had not made enough progress, but Mr Mugabe said the extension was more proof that the EU did not want poorer nations to develop.

Malawi dials 4th cell

(Times Live)

Feb 13, 2010

Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority spokesman Zamuziko Makambo said on Friday that the government wanted a fourth operator to boost competition and improve services.

"We have three operators, namely Zain, TNM and Gmobile, but we want another operator to help reduce the cost of doing business and improve the quality of telecommunication services," Makambo said.

Kuwait-owned Zain is the leading operator, followed by Telekoms Networks Malawi, a wholly Malawian-owned company.

Gmobile is owned by a consortium of Malawian businessmen in partnership with Berry Telecoms of South Africa. It has yet to roll out services since being granted a licence last year.

Malawi's President Bingu wa Mutharika has accused the operators of charging high tariffs and providing a sub-standard service.

SOUTHERN AFRICA: Women Traders Demand Support

(Inter Press Service News Agency)

Feb 19, 2010

JOHANNESBURG, Feb 19 (IPS) - Support for regional trade is one of the cornerstones of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). But the focus has been on large scale trade in goods and services, ignoring one important group trading throughout the region.

Cross-border traders, many of them women, have been contributing to the development of their nations and families, even before the establishment of the regional body.

According to a 2004 United Nations World Food Programme report, informal cross border trade played a significant role in averting widespread food insecurity during the 2002/03 drought that devastated the region.

And a United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) report, 'Women in Informal Cross Border Trade in Southern Africa,' says the average value contribution of informal cross border trade in the SADC region is 17.6 billion U.S. dollars per year, accounting for 30-40 percent of intra-SADC Trade.

The UNIFEM report was released at a workshop for Women Informal Cross Border Traders held from 8th to 11th February.

"By ignoring informal cross border trade, SADC member states could be overlooking a significant proportion of their trade," UNIFEM Southern Africa Regional Director Nomcebo Manzini told IPS.

Traders demand recognition

At the workshop, cross border traders declared 2010 to be the year they are going to fight for regional government to acknowledge their contribution.

"This year we want them to recognise that cross border traders contribute to the GDP (gross domestic product) and put in place legal frameworks which protect us because there is a lot of harassment by government officials during transit," Charity Mombeshora, the Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Association's secretary for gender and women's affairs told IPS.

Their declaration is timed to coincide with the FIFA World Cup 2010 football tournament, which is expected to boost business for the host country - South Africa - and regionally.

And like any other entrepreneurs, women cross border traders want to see their businesses flourish and expand.

"We are encouraging our members to diversify... They must bring in something new for them and the industry to grow so that we can come with [shipping] containers also instead of coming with a bag. We don't want to remain being ICBTs," Thandi Tshukudu from Botswana said.

Obstacles to overcome

But the women traders are limited by unfavourable policies and a working environment that is hostile to women.

Shortages of foreign currency in some countries and stringent banking regulations throughout the region make it very difficult for them to operate bank accounts in the various countries they trade in.

Banks are reluctant to advance financial assistance to women traders because they have little in the way of collateral and the nature of business is deemed risky.

"Our main goal this year is to push our leaders to make sure we have micro-finance institutions specifically for women cross border traders so that we can access loans. These loans should be long term loans, not like the one they have now where they expect you to pay back in thirty days," said Mozambican trader Lucia Cunica.

"Challenges are plenty. One such is transport from home.... when you get to the border its even worse and hectic, (Immigration officials) treat us like criminals... at times we spend hours at the border," Christine Mongo from Zambia told IPS.

"The other challenge is like I am in transit to Namibia, I have my goods. I am charged duty in Botswana, yet I am in transit! And when I get to Namibia, I am charged duty again. At the end of the day the profit margin is very thin," added Jacqueline Shonga.

Accommodation is a major concern for traders. They rent private homes or sleep in buses or bus shelters. Some enter into sexual relationships in order to secure accommodation for their trips. They risk rape and other forms of gender-based violence as well as contracting HIV.

The women traders at the UNIFEM workshop said they would create associations and cooperatives in the region to make strategic decisions for investment of the money generated from their trade. The associations will help train women cross border traders in areas such as product value addition, business management and record-keeping.

Zimbabwean Ministers Urge Exiled Businessmen to Return Home

15 February 2010

(Voice of America)

Zimbabwe's two home affairs (Interior) ministers earlier this month told a gathering of successful Zimbabwean businessmen in Johannesburg that the government of President Robert Mugabe and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai wants them to return to help revive the economy.

Mr. Mugabe's ZANU-PF party and Mr. Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change jointly run the Home Affairs portfolio in the power-sharing government that emerged one year ago.

The unity government has stabilized the Zimbabwean economy after years of hyper-inflation and economic decline.

The home affairs minister representing ZANU-PF, Kembo Mohadi, urged exiled businessmen who wish to invest in Zimbabwe to visit the country, saying foreign media were responsible for the negative reports on the investment climate.

"Investment opportunities in Zimbabwe are abundant and conducive for every business interest. As a country and government we do not trample on individual or property rights," Mohadi said.

The MDC Home Affairs Minister Giles Mutsekwa, said it is the duty of every Zimbabwean to help rebuild the nation and he added that the government knows it must make the business environment free.

"The main reason why we have come here is to give assurances, as the two ministers who are responsible for the interior, that we will - the two of us - endeavor to ensure that you come back home without any hindrance, most importantly that you come back home without anybody victimizing you whilst you are in that country," Mutsekwa said.

Several businessmen attending the event had experienced difficulties with the Zimbabwean government. They had been "specified" which means their companies had been taken over by government-appointed administrators after they were accused of alleged illegal activities.

Critics say the controversial specification law has been used by some individuals with political connections to raid profitable companies.

One of those present was John Moxon, the former chairman of the board of the Meikles corporation that owns extensive tourism operations in Zimbabwe. Moxon was specified amidst a dispute with the company's chief executive and fled Zimbabwe after a months of harassment.

Home Affairs Minister Mutsekwa said a debate had been launched on whether specification discourages investment and whether methods other than specification could be used to investigate suspected law-breakers.

"That debate is going on. But while that debate is going on the two minister of Home Affairs have taken it upon themselves that we will clear all outstanding issues regarding specification," Mutsekwa said.

The head of the defunct Trust Bank, William Nyemba, who had also been specified, said many businessmen are keen to return.

"And I can't wait to be going back home soon, I believe so, to go and resuscitate Trust Bank. And if we can get the opportunity to try and help rebuild our country, let's do so," Nyemba said.

Nevertheless, many foreign investors have been unnerved by recent moves on profitable companies, including renewed seizures of white-owned commercial farms and orders to some tourism operators to take on local partners.

A new law was published last week in the official government gazette that would require foreign owners of major companies in certain sectors to sell 51 percent ownership to black Zimbabweans within five years.

The law was passed by the ZANU-PF controlled parliament before the inauguration of the unity government. Prime Minister Tsvangirai has rejected the law saying it was published without consulting the cabinet and would scare away foreign investment.

Botswana: Govt Agree to Spend P1 Billion on De Beers Debt

(Mmegi)

15 February 2010

The cash-strapped government has agreed to spend US \$150 million (P1 billion) in helping to cut De Beers' debts which currently stand at \$3 billion.

According to a statement from the mining company, Government and the two other shareholders in De Beers, Anglo American Corporation and the Oppenheimer family, have agreed to pump US \$1 billion (P6.7 billion) into the company through a rights issue as additional equity capital in proportion to their existing equity holdings in the company.

Government has a 15 percent stake in De Beers, while Anglo American Corporation and the Oppenheimer family hold a 45 percent and 40 percent stake respectively.

"De Beers is pleased to confirm that the shareholders of the De Beers Group being Anglo American Corporation plc, the Oppenheimer family and the Government of Botswana agreed to subscribe for additional equity capital of US\$1 billion in proportion to their existing equity holdings in the company.

"The shareholders of De Beers, including the Government of Botswana have benefited significantly from the investment in the De Beers Group. For instance, as at November 2009, the Government of Botswana had earned in excess of US\$507million (BWP3,5 billion) in dividends from its investment," said a statement from De Beers Botswana.

The decision to bail out De Beers comes at a time when government itself is heavily in debt having posted a P13.39 billion budget deficit last year and expect to borrow a further P12 billion this year to finance both its recurrent and capital obligations.

The P1 billion rights issue comes after government again gave a P570 million shareholder loan to De Beers, according to the 2010/11 national budget statement presented by Finance Minister Kenneth Matambo to parliament last Monday.

However, it is still unclear how Government is going to fund this rights issue as the obligation was not factored into either the 2009/10 or the 2010/11 national budget.

Asked to comment on the source of the funds, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Minerals, Energy and Water Resources Gabaake Gabaake could only confirm that the funds are supposed to be paid by March this year, but referred all other questions to the Ministry of Finance. Efforts to get a comment from Finance Permanent Secretary Solomon Segwagwa proved futile.

Meanwhile, De Beers last week announced their results for the year ended December 2009, in which the company posted a net loss of \$743 million in 2009, compared with net earnings of \$90 million for the previous year.

Group sales fell 44 percent to \$3.84 billion, with rough sales conducted through the Diamond Trading Company (DTC) down 45 percent to \$3.24 billion.

"The combination of three principle factors - high stock levels throughout the diamond pipeline, constricted liquidity in the industry and lower levels of retail and consumer demand - led to substantially lower demand for rough diamonds," De Beers MD Gareth Penny said in a statement released on Thursday.

The company says in spite of exceptionally difficult trading conditions, which saw sales decline from US\$6.89 billion in 2008 to US\$3.84 billion in 2009, De Beers exceeded its cost-reduction targets, enabling the company to remain cash positive for the year. Looking into the future, De Beers say that Demand for rough diamonds has been much improved at the first Sight of the year and expectations are for this to continue in the upcoming February Sight.

"However, De Beers will continue to take a cautious and prudent approach to production and sales levels for 2010. Consumer demand for diamond jewellery is beginning to recover, driven in part by the strength of the developing markets of China and India.

"However, with the fragility of the world economy and perceived weakness of the global recovery post recession, the company would only expect a gradual increase in production levels, sales and prices.

"Desire for diamonds remains strong and, given the improvement of industry fundamentals, the Directors are cautiously optimistic about medium-term prospects," says the mining giant.

Mozambique: Five Year Licences for Private Water Suppliers

(Agencia de Informacao de Mocambique)

15 February 2010

Maputo — Private water suppliers in Maputo and the neighbouring city of Matola seem to have won their demand for five year licences.

The National Water Board (DNA) announced on Friday that these licences would indeed be issued. This concession followed the private suppliers' rejection of one year licences, and their threat to turn off the taps, depriving of water those citizens of the two cities not covered by the public network.

DNA deputy director Suzana Laforte, cited in Monday's issue of the independent daily "O Pais", said "we entered negotiations with the private water suppliers and we came to the conclusion that we must give them five-year licenses as they demand. The government acknowledges their importance to the communities, and thus they must be listened to".

She stressed that this process must not benefit only the private operators or the government, but must preserve the interests of the public.

This means that no decision taken during the negotiations should prejudice the interests of the consumers or the quality of the water supplied.

Laforte added that the issuing of licences by the government's Water Supply Assets and Investment Fund (FIPAG) will not be interrupted, because this is a way to create a complete data base of all private operators (the private operators had wanted to deny FIPAG any role in licensing).

"As from May we will start issuing five-year licenses. But we will see case by case and verify if they all have the basic requirements, and proceed from there", said Laforte, adding that the negotiations also included the matter of expanding the public water supply network.

She claimed that at no moment had the private operators opposed the expansion of the public network (though once the public network covers all of greater Maputo, no-one will want to buy more expensive water from private wells).

"The important thing is a dialogue with the private suppliers, because we, as government, are aware that they have made some investments and it is necessary that somehow the interests of this group be preserved", said Laforte.

She added that the one-year licenses already issued by FIPAG will also be extended to five years.

The question of the power to issue licenses is yet to be discussed, which means that although the private operators do not accept the legitimacy of FIPAG in this regard, the government says it is not a priority for the moment.

"The important thing is to ensure that issuing of licenses goes ahead as agreed. We, as government, will delegate somebody to do it and know that this license is legal", said Laforte.

For his part, the chairperson of the private water suppliers, Paulino Cossa, expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the negotiations, saying that "we must work hard to ensure that the water we supply to the consumers is of good quality, and that there is no disparity in prices".

Namibia: Petrol Price Up Again

(The Namibian)

15 February 2010

FUEL prices increase on Wednesday for the first time in the new year, when 95 octane unleaded petrol goes up by 20 cents per litre, while the price of 93 octane lead replacement petrol (LRP) rises by 17 cents per litre and diesel by 7,0 cents a litre.

When the new pump prices become effective at 00h01 on February 17, unleaded petrol will cost N\$7,20 a litre at Walvis Bay. LRP will sell for N\$7,11 a litre, while diesel will cost N\$7,14 a litre.

Announcing the adjustments on Friday, Mines and Energy Minister Erkki Nghimtina said although oil prices have remained relatively resilient in an environment of rising risk aversion, this will not be able to persist for long, since a period of stronger oil prices is unlikely to be sustainable until global oil demand gets on more solid footing.

"It is apparent that crude oil prices will remain volatile, hence necessary precaution and due diligence need to be exercised in reviewing fuel prices to avoid a negative effect on the economy and the purchasing power of the consumers during periods of heavy price shocks," Nghimtina said.

The Minister has also increased the Motor Vehicle Accident Fund levy by three cents a litre on both petrol and diesel. The increase is included in the new price structure.

South Africa: Business Still in the Dark Over Implications of Emissions Pledges

(Business Day)

15 February 2010

Johannesburg — THE government has reconfirmed its commitment to reducing its emissions trajectory - but business still has little detail on what it will be asked to do.

SA has undertaken to reduce its emissions trajectory by 34% by 2020, calculated on a business as usual scenario, and by 42% by 2025. This was stressed on Thursday night by President Jacob Zuma in his state of the nation address, when he said SA had committed itself to specific reduction targets and would continue "working on a long-term climate change mitigation strategy".

He said the industrial policy action plan and a focus on green jobs would build stronger and more labour-absorbing industries.

But on Friday, business complained that the detail on these commitments remained scanty . "Industry still has little detail on what each sector will be required to do," said Laurraine Lotter, of the Chemical and Allied Industries Association.

Lotter, who is also Business Unity SA's (Busa's) spokeswoman on climate change, said 70% of emissions came from the energy sector. "We've got to see what the supply side will do, so we can see what we need to do. A saving on carbon dioxide emissions as a result of energy efficiency might not be sufficient in order to meet the pledge. It's not going to be trivial. This is a serious commitment," she said.

Lotter said each industry sector would be allocated a portion of the reduction needed, but that apportionment was not yet known. "We've got to know exactly how they added up the numbers."

Lotter said Busa was eager to work with the government to create green jobs, which would probably be in service industries. She welcomed the confirmation that an independent system operator, separate from Eskom, would be established in the electricity sector.

Joanne Yawitch, deputy director-general in the Department of Environmental Affairs, said the government had held two closed meetings with industry to discuss the details of the pledge. The information would be released in due course.

A report produced last year, on which SA's pledge was based, was still an internal discussion document, the department said.

An industry insider said there was unhappiness about the failure to release the report . "We as industry have no idea what the implications are. Between 8% and 10% on current levels is feasible; most industries can achieve this," he said.

The report was possibly being held back to protect Eskom, which is seeking international funding for its new build programme, he said.

South Africa: Rand Weakens After Chinese Bank Move

(Business Day)

15 February 2010

Johannesburg — THE rand weakened after China toughened bank regulations aimed at reducing loan growth, raising concern that the measures would cool the world's fastest-growing economy and reduce demand for commodities.

The currency lost as much as 0,9% to R7,7463/ on Friday, from an opening of R7,6937.

The euro also lost as much as 1% against the dollar on Friday due to the monetary tightening in China and also on concern that a European plan to help Greece tackle its fiscal deficit will fall short. The US dollar index, which measures the currency against six others, jumped by as much as 0,9% on Friday.

"The short-term reaction in emerging market currencies is negative because of possible impact of China's decision on commodity prices and the global recovery," said Anders Svendsen, an emerging markets economist at Nordea Markets in Copenhagen. "In the longer term, China's decision might be positive because they're doing it to avoid bubbles," he said.

Cannon Asset Managers chief investment officer Adrian Saville said moves to tighten lending by China were marginal in the context of credit extension of about 40%. "They are so far behind the curve," he said.

Two of the country's major asset classes, property and stocks were "outrageously expensive" with the price-to-book value of stocks averaging at seven times, where perhaps three times may be more appropriate.

Japan's price-to-book was 0,7 times, and chances were the quality of the investment was better. "Investors in China are paying 10 times the value just for growth," he said.

The People's Bank of China ordered banks to set aside more deposits by raising their reserve requirement by 50 basis points, effective Thursday next week.

Stocks around the world and commodity prices dropped following China's decision, on concerns the limits may reduce demand just as the global economy shows signs of revival. Gold fell as much as 1,4% to 1078,06/oz while platinum slid up to 1,7% to 1492,50/oz. The price of Brent crude oil closed 1,6% lower at 72,90 per barrel. The Dow Jones industrial average closed 0,4% lower.

Zambia: 'Mfezs Good for Economy'

(The Times of Zambia)

15 February 2010

COMMERCE, Trade and Industry Permanent Secretary Buleti Nsemukila has said multi-facility economic zones (MFEZs) are the faster way of adding value to local products.

Speaking on Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation National Watch programme yesterday, Dr Nsemukila said for Zambia to grow the manufacturing industry it should set up MFEZs.

He said the Government was also encouraging the private-public partnership (PPP) because it would help develop infrastructure.

On the same programme, Zambia China Business Association chairperson Sebastian Kopulande said 500 Zambian business persons had in the last five years been to China to learn various issues.

Mr Kopulande also said liberalisation should not be at the expense of the local economy and that money raised in the country should not be externalised.

He said although the Zambian economy had grown by 6.3 per cent, mainly because of the mining sector, local businesses could not access the money because it was externalised.

Zimbabwe: 1,000 Delegates Expected for Investment Summit

(The Herald)

15 February 2010

Harare — MORE than 1 000 local and international delegates converge in Harare today for the 5th Pan African Tourism Investment Summit and the International Conference on Investment Opportunities in Tourism and Related Sectors.

The investment summit, organised by Africa investor in conjunction with the Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality Industry, and the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, offers the country the opportunity to position itself as an attractive and competitive investment destination.

Vice President John Nkomo is expected to open the summit and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai is scheduled to close it.

Minister of Tourism and Hospitality Industry Walter Mzembi told journalist at a Press conference on Friday that 10 ministers of tourism are expected from different African countries and more than 300 foreign investors are expected for the summit.

"The two-in-one event will showcase tourism investment opportunities in Zimbabwe and Africa at large. Projects exhibition will be pitched to profile investment opportunities in tourism and related sectors," Minister Mzembi said.

He added that both the summit and the conference are expected to attract high profile representation including those from ministries and departments, parastatals and state enterprises, national organisations, financial institutions, investors and development co-operating partners.

The World Bank, International Finance Corporation, African Development Bank, Afrexim Bank, Development Bank of Southern Africa, Industrial Development Corporation, CBA Capital Partners, Actis and Renaissance Capital have confirmed their participation.

The summit will also bring together international authorities involved in commercialising legacy projects from previous World Cups and major sporting events.

Minister Mzembi said his ministry had embarked on a number of strategies aimed at developing tourism in the country, including re-engaging the United Nations World Tourism Organisation, to develop the sector across Africa.

The tourism sectors suffered a -9 percent negative growth in 2008 due to a protracted hostile publicity campaign on Zimbabwe on the political front.

However the negative development was countered in 2009, with the sector registering a positive 4,7 percent growth after the formation of the inclusive Government that brought about a political settlement and investment confidence among international investors. Going forward, the tourism sector is expected to grow by a significant 10 percent this year, underpinned by increased arrivals and the Fifa World Cup to be hoisted by neighbouring South Africa.

Minister Mzembi said there is a need by Government to develop tourism-related sectors that include transport, infrastructure development and information communication technology.

"We need a stimulus to pick up our tourism sector and we also managed to undertake an aggressive marketing campaign. We managed to reduced a number of travel warnings and restrictions from the traditional and emerging markets.

"It is clear that Zimbabwe is now a competitive and safe investment destination.

"However, there are a number of issues we need to continue looking at, we need to increase our accessibility and connectivity," said Minister Mzembi.

He said concerted efforts from both the public and private sector managed to halt further decline in the tourism sector, which is forecast to steam ahead to the 1996 levels.

In 2007, the tourism sector contributed 16,7 percent to Gross Domestic Product albeit on a smaller GDP base.

Zimbabwe: EU Hands Over Trucks to ZFU

(The Herald)

15 February 2010

Harare — The European Union last Friday handed over 11 trucks to the Zimbabwe Farmers Union.

Poor transport has over the years hampered fertilizer distribution, vaccine distribution, outreach, extension work, trade and marketing initiatives by the ZFU. Speaking at the hand over ceremony at ZFU offices in Harare, the union president, Mr Silas Hungwe said the donation would go a long way in improving operations of the organisation.

"The union had been handicapped for quite some time in terms of mobility to reach out to farmers making the union non existent. These vehicles will go a long way in providing the much-needed transport to take staff and farmer leaders into all corners of Zimbabwe to meet farmers.

Speaking on behalf of the EU country representative, Mr Xavier Marchal, Mr Joost Bakkeren said his organisation started supporting agriculture and food security focusing on small holder farmers.

"EU has provided direct support to the population through food aid, food security, small scale irrigation, rural development with emphasis on water, basic education, health and essential medicines," Mr Bakkeren said.

This season, EU implemented a seed and fertilizer distribution scheme that has covered 21 districts all over the country and nearly 180 000 beneficiaries.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation managed the programme that was being implemented by different non-governmental organisations.

EU also launched projects in support of livestock health such as vaccine distribution and dip tank rehabilitation with focus on communal livestock.

Zimbabwe: Investment Conference Offers Opportunities

(The Herald)

16 February 2010

Harare — THIS week, Zimbabwe hosts yet another international investment conference, this time focusing on tourism.

Once again Zimbabwe's top leaders have been lined up to speak at the conference.

They will be joined by 14 African Government ministers and at least 32 chief executives of international investment financiers.

Up to 300 delegates are expected to attend.

There has been quite a few of these conferences either in Zimbabwe or on Zimbabwe in the case of those held outside the country.

Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara has also been busy with his quest to re-brand Zimbabwe.

Our Minister of Tourism and Hospitality Industry Walter Mzembi has been all over marketing Zimbabwe as a preferable tourist destination.

We clearly have not lacked effort but whether or not we have been able turn all this hard work into real investment is questionable.

The mining indaba held last year was a resounding success in terms of attendance and it looks like the turnout for the Pan-African Tourism and Infrastructure Investment Summit that started in Harare yesterday is equally good.

But judging the success of investment conferences by attendance alone is not good enough. Have we really done an assessment of the previous investment conferences?

What real investment has resulted from the mining indaba?

What feedback did we get from the investors and what have we done about it?

The concerns that investors would express about Zimbabwe are the same whether they are in mining, manufacturing, tourism or agriculture.

These investment conferences should not just be talk shows.

Yes, the delegates will be talking about tourism strategies, investment opportunities and tourism infrastructure development ahead of the 2010 soccer World Cup. But the World Cup is only three months away. Maximising on the World Cup will require leaders that can work round the clock to implement whatever strategies will come from the conference.

Whether or not we needed a conference only three months before the World Cup is debatable. The fact that there are willing sponsors for a conference is not a good reason to have one.

It is what we do before, during and after the conference that matters.

At the last major investment conference in Harare, the principals to Zimbabwe's Global Political Agreement spoke so eloquently about the investment climate.

The President took time to address the concerns of the investors on subjects such as land reform, property rights and the empowerment drive.

There was so much clarity on the investment opportunities and legislative framework prevailing in Zimbabwe. But subsequent to that, we have seen some attempts to create

confusion about what Zimbabwe really offers and what guarantees are there for the investors.

Ahead of this conference we have seen some unfortunate public squabbling about the indigenisation laws. The last time we had a major tourism event, the Sanganai/Hlanganani expo it was dampened by the partial disengagement by MDC-T from Government. Our visitors left Zimbabwe confused as to why we had invited them. We had shot ourselves in the foot.

The Pan-African Tourism and Infrastructure Investment Summit offers our leaders yet another opportunity to clearly spell out Government policy on foreign direct investment, the opportunities that are available and the full implications of the legislative framework.

This is not just a conference for Zimbabwe but for the Sadc region and the African continent but we can use it to get the world to understand us -- where we are coming from and where we are going.

The World Cup is a major marketing opportunity for Africa in general and for the countries in Southern Africa in particular. Now that the spotlight is on us, we should do our best to impress.

Zimbabwe: SA Company Introduces Portable Housing System

(The Herald)

15 February 2010

Harare — A SOUTH African company, Thazade Light Steel Construction, has introduced a new housing concept of foldable and portable units in Zimbabwe that is suitable for the country's disaster-prone areas.

The house is also suitable for new farming areas where farmers are still to construct permanent structures as well as for office space.

The foldable houses, which can easily be erected or dismantled, will come in handy for low-lying areas in Dotito, Muzarabani and Tsholotsho, where homes were destroyed by flooding.

The concept allows Government and other service providers to provide accommodation, health and other social needs of people within a short period of time in the event of disasters.

Foldable galvanised houses can also be used in non-disaster areas where the erection of permanent structures is still to be completed.

The houses were launched in the country last week by National Housing Minister Fidelis Mhashu, who said the houses could replace tents following natural and human disasters.

He said concept enabled the country to provide low income housing to the people

"This innovation will undoubtedly cushion the poor given the median income in Zimbabwe. It is, therefore, important to make use of these partnerships in meeting the country's short-term needs.

"I am convinced that the light steel housing models provide durable and decent shelter which can cater for the immediate, short and long-term housing problems.

"My ministry is positive that the adoption of this modern technology will go a long way in guaranteeing decent, sustainable and affordable housing for all citizens in all circumstances," he said.

The portable steel houses, which were on exhibition at the National Housing Convention in Victoria Falls last year, can be designed to owner's specifications. This type of house is widely in use in South Africa.

Thazade Light Steel Construction managing director Mr Jack Matiza said his company would produce units with an area of 12 square metres, 28m² or 36m² with a life span of 50 years.

"We are working on establishing a manufacturing plant in the country so that we reduce the costs of the units. A single unit requires between five and eight people to erect or dismantle. A 12-square metre house will cost US\$2 000 and price will be low if the panels are produced in Zimbabwe.

"To cushion people from heat, the foldable houses are fitted wi

Botswana: Germans Eye Country's Energy and Water Sectors

(Mmegi)

17 February 2010

A 22 member business delegation from Germany is in the country to explore investment opportunities in various sectors of the economy mainly mining and energy.

The visit, which is the culmination of BEDIA's efforts to lure investors from around the world, is expected to boost foreign direct investment and trade between the two countries which is currently negligible.

Speaking at a seminar to brief the Germans on the opportunities in Botswana in Gaborone yesterday, BEDIA CEO Jacob Nkate was hopeful that the coming of the delegation marks the beginning of a fruitful bilateral economic and investment relationship between the two countries .

" As we come out of the recession, I believe the beginning of this partnership will benefit both sides and I hope to see serious business ventures produced by this visit," he said. BEDIA director of Public relations and communications Kungo Lentswe said that the delegation which is in Botswana to explore investment opportunities in the agriculture,

water resources, mining and energy sectors, is reciprocating a similar visit by BEDIA to German last year.

" They are here at the invitation of our London office and we are going to take them to various parts of the country to expose them to the opportunities that Botswana has to offer to the countries," she said.

BEDIA, which won the annual Africa Investor Investment and Business Leaders Awards last year, also hosted a similar delegation last month from India, where they have also established an office. Deputy German Ambassador to Botswana Karl Hofinger says that he is hopeful the coming of the delegation will boost economic activity between the two countries which is currently very low.

" At present there are no big German companies that operate in Botswana except for representative offices of companies such as Volkswagen or Mercedes Benz.

"Trade between the two countries is also very minimal with Germany only importing beef and textile from here while Botswana mainly import machinery from Germany," he said.

The delegation which will be in the country until Saturday is expected to meet captains of industry and will also visit the BCL mine, Tati Nickel mine, Morupule colliery and power station and the newly established 70 MW APR diesel power station near Francistown.

Among some of the companies represented in the delegation include Aggretech which manufactures emergency diesel generator sets ; Firstclimate, a carbon asset management company; Herrenknecht, whose product range includes machines for traffic and transport tunnels and Siemens AG which provide solutions for power generation, transmission and distribution.

Other companies are involved in environmental and engineering consultancy, foodstuffs , water pipes and valves, cement manufacturing and vehicle testing devices.

Zimbabwe: Resources Key to Development – President

(THE HERALD)

18 February 2010

Harare — Africa's diverse natural and cultural resources are key to the continent's development, President Mugabe has said.

Officially opening the Pan-African Tourism Investment Conference in Harare yesterday, the President said Africa had the capacity to lead global development.

"It is the potential that the tourism sector possesses in growing African economies and alleviating the rancid poverty amongst our people that creates the greatest interest in us.

"It should nevertheless be recognised and appreciated that the potential which the sector has to empower the historically disadvantaged sections of our populations, namely women and youths, challenges us to examine the full scale of possible projects across Africa," he said.

President Mugabe said Government embraced the United Nations World Tourism Organisation's Roadmap to Recovery of the tourism sector.

He said the Pan-African Tourism Conference constituted a practical step towards the realisation of the UNWTO objectives.

President Mugabe urged African ministers attending the meeting to advance the integrated development of the sector.

"Such continental integration has not only been at the centre of the Pan-Africanist vision, since its conception, but it is the adopted strategy for accelerated development the world over, whether we look at Europe, America or Asia. Why then should we be different?"

"We need to move faster and more purposefully towards continental integration and collaboration and eventually, unite."

He said stakeholders should develop regional and continentally packaged tourism packages for tourists.

President Mugabe urged African governments and international investors to work out acceptable terms for increased investment in tourism.

He said Government had opened its doors to investment in tourism to as many serious investors as possible.

"We will also particularly welcome investment in our transport and communication infrastructure, which are key enablers for the tourism sector."

He challenged conference participants to identify ways of building the legacy of the first Fifa Soccer World Cup to be hosted in Africa this June as a tourist event.

The summit's objectives, President Mugabe said, were closely linked to the inclusive Government's objectives.

These include: creating the right environment for the growth of tourism; accommodating the views of fund managers and leaders in other specialised fields; marketing and promoting Africa's tourism investment profiles; and the optimum utilisation of existing opportunities in Africa's tourism sector.

Deputy Prime Ministers Arthur Mutambara and Thokozani Khupe, Cabinet Ministers, diplomats, stakeholders in the tourism sector and regional, continental and international investors attended the official opening.

Zambian Tourism Minister Catherine Namugala, her Namibian counterpart Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah and Ghana's Juliana Azumah-Mensah were also in attendance.

Addressing the conference on Tuesday, African tourism ministers called on the continent to maximise on its natural advantages and market itself as the best tourist destination in the world.

The ministers said Africa needed tourism packages that marketed it as one destination with various attractions.

Tourism and Hospitality Industry Minister Walter Mzembi said: "Let us do away with those elements that put the continent in the negative light and take advantage of the various advantages that we have such as the natural environment, abundant wildlife and diverse culture.

"Tourism ministers must continue to position Africa as a unique product. "This requires that they meet regularly to brainstorm and share experience."

Minister Nhema said Africa was yet to be "discovered" hence the need for the continent to market itself well.

"We want something that is African, something that smells and looks African. We do not want another Las Vegas or New York as this does not reflect the continent," he said.

Zambia's Minister Namugala said there was no need to continue bickering over ownership of Victoria Falls as the attraction was an African heritage that should be used to develop the continent.

"African nations should make sure investors coming to the continent will help in developing its resources and not only to make money.

"Investors should also not hustle to get investment since their role was to create business and employment for the local people," she said.

Her Ghanaian counterpart Minister Azumah-Mensah said Africa needed to show that it was not all about conflict.

Social Developments

ZIMBABWE: "Small House, Big House" showing soon on TV

(Alert Net)

19 Feb 2010

HARARE, 19 February 2010 (IRIN) - A new Zimbabwean short film on multiple concurrent sexual partnerships (MCPs) runs for just 24 minutes, but the producers are hoping that its message will last much longer.

The film, "Big House, Small House" is the latest offering from the One Love Campaign, which works to reduce HIV prevalence and MCPs in 10 southern African countries. The title refers to the colloquial expression "small house", used to denote long-term, illicit sexual relationships in Zimbabwe.

The film was produced by the Action Institute for Environment, Health and Development Communication (ACTION), a local NGO, in partnership with the Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication, a South African NGO, and Zimbabwe's National AIDS Council (NAC).

Television stations around southern Africa will air the movie as part of a series of 10 films – one from each of the campaign's focus countries – highlighting the dangers of MCPs.

MCPs have been identified by both UNAIDS and regional leaders as one of the key drivers – along with inconsistent condom use and low levels of male circumcision – of southern Africa's HIV epidemic and Zimbabwe is no exception. Although the country has experienced a decline in HIV prevalence within the last decade, attributed to mortality and behaviour change, HIV prevalence remains high at about 15 percent, according to UNAIDS.

Localising the story

Using regional research on MCPs conducted in 2007, ACTION worked with partners to develop the script, which focuses on Simba and his wife, Shingi, who seemingly have the perfect relationship after 10 years of marriage – until Shingi finds that Simba has been having a long-term affair with a much younger woman.

"The film is about how their story unravels, and about some of the cultural challenges [like those] that say it's okay for men to have more than one 'wife'," said ACTION's Caroline Majonga. "It's about the discovery of betrayal, the complexities around sexual networks, how HIV comes into the picture, and how the couple deals with it."

Jasen Mphepho, who plays Simba in the film, said men were sometimes pressured into taking up a "small house" by friends and family. "Men want to be seen to conform to what they think is the norm; they want to please their friends and relatives, but in the

process they end up hurting the ones they love. I hope those who watch the film will be moved enough to protect the ones they love."

Although regional partner Soul City has stepped in to help train and sensitise local filmmakers, according to Harriet Perlman, Soul City senior executive for the region, the movie reflects Zimbabwe's unique message on MCPs.

Majonga said regional research had shown that people in southern Africa generally engaged in MCPs for the same reasons, like seeking sexual satisfaction, but Zimbabwe and other countries covered by the OneLove Campaign had now crafted their own messages on the topic and presented them in films like "Big House, Small House".

"A lot of the dissatisfaction [highlighted in research] was because people weren't able to communicate their expectations to one another. We want to show people how communicating would improve the quality of relationships," Majonga told IRIN/PlusNews.

"Our main message in Zimbabwe has been that we want to encourage people [to know] that it's possible to have a relationship that is both emotionally and physically satisfying with one person."

South Africa: Experts in the art of generating poverty

(Africa Files)

16 February 2010

In last week's State of the Nation speech, President Jacob Zuma displayed "no appreciation of the full extent of the massive crisis of unemployment, poverty, and inequality". So concluded his main alliance partner, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). New statistics about this crisis were revealed three weeks ago by the SA Labour and Development Research Unit at the University of Cape Town. "Income inequality increased between 1993 and 2008," reported Murray Leibbrandt, Ingrid Woolard, Arden Finn, and Jonathan Argent, and "poverty in urban areas has increased".

SA's GINI coefficient inequality measure raced ahead of Brazil's to become the world's leader among major countries: from 0.66 in 1993 to 0.70 in 2008. The income of the average black (African) person actually fell as a percentage of the average white's from 1995 (13.5 percent) to 2008 (13 percent). How could a democratic government amplify apartheid race-class inequality? It's stunning, but Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, Trevor Manuel, Alec Erwin, Tito Mboweni - and Zuma too - deserve credit for a feat not even the most extreme pessimist would have predicted when the ANC was unbanned exactly two decades ago.

According to the UCT researchers, inequality is "due both to rising unemployment and rising earnings inequality" - which is in turn partly due to labour broking, i e the outsourcing of formerly secure employment at much lower wages with no benefits. There are 500 000 outsourced workers in South Africa, according to industry sources, though

Stats SA are using a figure of less than 40 000. And Pravin Gordhan's Treasury confessed during parliamentary questions last October that,

"To conduct such a study would require detailed data on the number of workers involved with temporary employment services or labour broking, the wages of these workers and some estimate for the number of workers who would lose their jobs if labour broking were to be banned."

Leaders of a decent society would immediately find out the answers, then ban labour brokers, and at the same time increase state-subsidised employment creation - especially for badly needed green jobs - for all able-bodied workers.

Accumulate

But as the inequality data show, South Africa is just not that kind of place; it's a society where the ruling party's crony capitalists ally with those who grew wealthy during apartheid to accumulate yet more wealth. In our own microcosm at UKZN, the implications of this system are evident thanks to vivid lessons our administrators learned when the great teacher of poverty, Mamphela Ramphele, experimented on UCT's workforce a decade ago. A committed scholar-activist of the Black Consciousness Movement, she had to re-tool for a new, rather more lucrative stage of her career a decade ago: World Bank managing director. To create poverty on the prolific scale required at the bank, Ramphele got good training as UCT's vice-chancellor, from 1996-2000.

According to her deputy, Wieland Gevers, Ramphele's arrival marked "a turning point in UCT's history", as the university's "focus underwent a fundamental shift". Ramphele "served on the boards of several premier corporations. She came to UCT strongly convinced that its administration was archaic and not sufficiently informed by modern corporate practice". The ill wind blew away the rights of already low-paid workers. Gevers said: "In corporate fashion, and with support of UCT's Council, Mamphela out-sourced many functions that were not core business." By March, 2000, the Labour Court ruled that UCT could re-trench hundreds of non-academic staff, "a process which has already left many families homeless and fighting for survival", according to Independent's journalist, Beauregard Tromp.

As at UKZN, labour broking wrecked the lives of the UCT cleaning, gardening, maintenance, and messenger staff. Ramphele called this "pruning the tree of dead wood and inappropriately placed branches to make way for new shoots".

Dead wood?

Leonard Malukazi of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union observed Ramphele firing low-income workers with more than 30 years' service: "There were people who were about to retire in a year's time. Even then they didn't give a second thought to who they re-trenched." It was a brutal shock, says Malukazi. "The majority of university workers have been working to pay a housing bond, and with these re-

trenchments it basically means that you have entire families out on the streets without the benefits of health care or housing allowances."

As Ramphele's salary soared in the move from UCT to the World Bank, the workers suffered income cuts (to an average of R1 200 per month) and lost their 13th cheque, free medical aid, housing subsidy, and other benefits. According to UCT academics Jonathan Grossman and Vicki Scholtz, "Ramphele spoke of the 'painful decision' and assured the UCT community that the workers would be employed, retrained, and/or able to start their own businesses. As with so many painful decisions, the pain was all imposed on the victims of the decision by those taking it". But the workers resisted, and after more court battles, organising, and strikes they brought their pay up to R3 400 a month and forced UCT to adopt a code of conduct for sub-contractors.

The same process has begun at UKZN because of extremely low wages - cleaners take home just R1 000 a month, security guards R2 000 - and exploitative working conditions, including the mass firing of 80 vulnerable cleaning workers at the Westville campus last month.

Dangerous

It's a dangerous game, for anger at labour brokers led to tragic violence during the 2006 national security guards' strike. "The security industry paid pitiful wages and must take responsibility for what happened," conceded Ramphele, in her 2009 book *Laying Ghosts to Rest*. "The right to work for a decent reward was violated by its exploitative practices." She uses a chapter of that book to justify her UCT management practices, but somehow forgets to even mention the outsourcing of low-paid workers. This "talk-left walk-right" legacy, so typical of post-apartheid managerialism, continues to bedevil our universities; UKZN's mission statement sounds very progressive.

What can change the power balance?

Zuma is apparently not to be trusted to lead SA's "war on poverty" (remember that ancient slogan?). As COSATU observed on Friday, his speech contained "nothing on the creation of decent work, the spread of casualisation of labour, and the scourge of labour broking and nothing to explain how he intends to implement the 2009 manifesto commitment to 'avoid exploitation of workers and ensure decent work' ". What Zuma did do, however, was threaten more police brutality against the victims of his macro-economic policies, such as was witnessed in Balfour last week when police hunted down and tortured community activists. Zuma also promised Eskom's partial privatisation, notwithstanding SA's universally miserable experience with the likes of Telkom's Texan-Malaysian partners, Suez Water in Joburg, the crash of SAA-Swissair, AES power, toll roads, and Remant Alton bus deals, to name a few.

Eskom's privatisation "would ultimately wreck a crucial public national service and we shall continue to campaign vigorously to prevent the sell-off of a vital public asset", COSATU replied. The unity of consumers, communities, environmentalists, and workers both formally employed and outsourced might prevail. But we riff-raff are up against

formidable opponents from Pretoria to Washington, including world-class experts well-practised in the art of generating poverty and inequality.

Zambia: Housing affordability

(Africa Files)

15 February 2010

The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) has expressed concern over the high cost of housing in medium density areas across Zambia, especially Lusaka. According to the JCTR, this situation is making decent housing unaffordable to the majority of Zambians, forcing the poor to reside in poorly constructed houses with inadequate space to decently accommodate all family members. “While it is irrefutable that housing is a basic need” says Miniva Chibuye, Coordinator of the Social Conditions Programme, “the adequacy of it is perceived to be a luxury and often ignored”. The JCTR through its Satellite Homes Research, a qualitative survey of living conditions in high density areas of Lusaka, has over time revealed that this right is ignored.

In its quest to promote human dignity and social justice, the Church has always stressed the need to respect the rights of women and men such as the right to life and to means suitable for the proper development of life such as food, decent shelter, clothing and all necessary social services. This statement has been resonated by the UN Declaration on Human Rights. The right to adequate housing has specifically been enunciated under article 25(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and codified in other major international human rights treaties. Article 11(1) of the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights provides, in part, that "Parties to the present Covenant recognise the right of every-one to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions."

It is for this reason that the JCTR’s Basic Needs Basket (BNB) reflects the cost of a three bed room house in a medium density area such as Chelston and Kabwata. This is because, a three bed room house is considered to be culturally decent and adequate for an average family size of six. The three bedroom house is the appropriate size to promote a decent standard of living for a family of six to allow one bedroom for the girl-children, one for the boy-children and one for the parents. According to the UN Global Shelter Strategy, to which Zambia is a signatory, “adequate housing” encompasses adequate security, adequate privacy, adequate space, adequate lighting and adequate location with regards to work and basic facilities. However, over half of Lusaka’s population live in unplanned high density areas with little or no maintenance of existing infrastructure.

The cost of housing over the past year in the medium density areas has however increased. For example, a three bed room house now costs on average K1,500,000 in comparison to K1,100,000 in 2009. This unprecedented increase has led to the cost of living becoming very unaffordable. Additionally, the January BNB for Lusaka revealed that the nominal prices of food has increased by K20,300 from a total of K822,100 at the end of December to K842,400 at the end of January. Increases were recorded in mealie meal and protein rich foods such as beans, meat and eggs. Adding the cost of housing and

other essential basic needs such as energy, water and sanitation, the cost of living as at end of January 2010 amounted to K2,696,030 up from K2,276,730 in December 2009. It is important to bring to the fore the fact that there is a causal link among diverse basic needs and these reinforce one another.

For example, decent housing plays a major role in curbing diseases. Fundamentally”, says Ms. Chibuye, “good housing and well-serviced neighbourhoods should not just be appreciated for its intrinsic value but also for the positive impacts on human capital and capabilities for participation”. In most high density areas however, the lack of proper drainages has led to a situation of recurring floods and incidences of water borne diseases such as cholera, particularly during the rainy season. The urban poor suffer the most as they tend to live in very poorly serviced high density areas. As a consequence, the cost of decent housing exacerbates inequalities in accessing them. These excessive economic and social differences militate against the principles of social justice and equity.

Certainly, there is an urgent need to improve poor urban resident’s housing needs. The state must take reasonable legislative action, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of this right in carrying out measures to develop national shelter strategies and settlement improvement programmes. For example, the state can endeavour to improve houses, roads and drainages in high density areas such as Kanyama. The upgrading of the informal settlements should be in such a way that there’s access to piped water, sanitation, good roads and other social services. Successful implementation of such a programme requires a holistic strategy involving various Government ministries such as Finance and National Planning, Local Government and Housing, Health and Education. It is the JCTR’s hope that the Sixth National Development Plan will show a clear road map for upgrading the high density areas.

Zimbabwe state employees march against low pay

(Alert Net)

19 Feb 2010

HARARE, Feb 19 (Reuters) - Zimbabwe government workers marched through the capital on Friday, saying they were scaling up a job boycott against low wages, in a sign of growing impatience with the country's year-old unity government.

The workers, who earn between \$122 and \$206 a month and want the government to raise wages to \$600, downed tools on Feb. 19, but the job action has been patchy with most workers turning up for work.

Unlike in the past where the police have violently broken up peaceful marches, leaders from the state workers' union led more than 1,000 members through the streets of central Harare and presented petitions at parliament building and the offices of the minister of finance.

"We are trying to compel the government to listen to our demands. We are also scaling up our struggle in view of the threats from the employer that the strike is illegal," said

Oswald Madziwa, programmes officer at Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe.

Major unions representing teachers, health workers, state college and university lecturers as well as office workers, earlier held a rally where they denounced the government and vowed to continue with the strike.

The unity government formed a year ago to end a protracted political crisis says it needs at least \$10 billion to reverse a decade of economic decline, but is struggling to get foreign aid.

Finance Minister Tendai Biti has said civil service pay takes up at least 60 percent of revenues, and limited resources make it difficult for the state to increase wages significantly.

If the strike continues and draws in more teachers and health professionals -- who make up the bulk of the civil service -- it would hurt efforts to revive key sectors that collapsed at the height of Zimbabwe's crisis in 2008 when public schools and hospitals ground to a halt.

The unity government has managed to stabilise the economy, mainly by dumping a local currency rendered worthless by hyperinflation and allowing the use of foreign currencies.

Malawians Debate Legalizing Gay Marriage

(Voice of America)

19 February 2010

In late December, two gay men held an engagement ceremony – and were promptly arrested. The event prompted a public debate over the legalization of homosexuality.

Sections 153 and 156 of the country's penal code outlaw sexual intercourse between people of the same sex. But some human rights campaigners argue that the laws contravene the constitution and international conventions that guarantee equality and non-discrimination regardless of sexual orientation.

Section 20 of the Malawi Constitution says discrimination against persons in any form is prohibited and all persons are guaranteed equal and effective protection against discrimination because of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, nationality, ethnic or social origin, disability, property, birth or other status.

Crispin Sibande, a human rights lawyer for the Malawi Human Rights Commission, says he thinks the phrase "other status" includes sexual orientation. He also describes the penal code as inconsistent with the Constitution, which deplores any form of discrimination.

"We have to change the law," he says, "mainly [to] conform to our penal code. When we allow homosexuals to come out in the open, we promote their right to health. We will

make sure these people are accessing health services in terms of going through HIV testing and accessing treatment [if they are HIV-positive].

"They should be able to go the hospital and get treatment without being worried about whether the doctor will ask how [they] got this infection."

Human rights law vs. tradition

But traditional leaders say allowing homosexuality would violate the country's traditional values, which regard the practice as a taboo. But Sibande says as long as gay people live without violating other people's rights, there is nothing wrong.

"I don't think that is correct," he says. "I will give an example: in Malawi it was a taboo for a woman to put on trousers. It was a taboo for a woman to put on a miniskirt. But over the time we have debated these things and we have moved [away] from that.

"Now, homosexuals, in my understanding, are not demanding any extra rights. We are simply saying the same rights that everybody is enjoying; let those rights [be] enjoyed by them. Let them be accepted in...society."

Malawi's main religions are Islam and Christianity and in both religions same sex marriage is a sin.

Some religious leaders, like Apostle Felix Zalimba, the leader of the All for Jesus church, say homosexuality is immoral and that two people of the same sex can't have sex and be accepted in society.

"It is the question of saying what the Bible," explains Zalimba. "The Bible is very explicit that homosexuality is not only a sin but also an abomination."

Undule Mwakasungura is the executive director of the local NGO Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation.

"We strongly need to consider the human rights and freedom of gay people," says Mwakasungura, "so that they can enjoy the rights to equality before the law, and this should be done through amending our laws to accommodate groups such as gays. HIV-aids cannot be achieved without recognizing the groups such as the gay citizens."

Ambokile Salimu, a legal expert, says "there are two alternatives to end this debate: referring the matter to the constitutional court or by holding a referendum - a broader approach to how the nation would address itself to the question of whether to legalize it or not, [where] people would vote on the issue."

Several international rights groups have also added their voices to the debate. Amnesty International has accused the country of failing to respect international treaties it has ratified, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights.

Government officials have responded by saying Malawi is a sovereign state with its own laws and values. They say they did not realize that signing such agreements would also mean protecting the rights of gay people.

Ambivalence over public disclosure

The existence of homosexuals in the country is not in dispute, though their exact numbers are not known. In 2009, an online newspaper, Nyasatimes, reported on the formation of an association called the Malawi Gay Rights Movement.

But Malawi has long been hostile to gays. In 2005, the Anglican Church in Malawi rejected the appointment of a British vicar, Rev. Nicholas Henderson, as the bishop-elect of the Lake Malawi diocese. The church said it based its decision on his support for gay rights.

In this atmosphere, it is difficult to find anyone to publicly admit to being a homosexual in Malawi. They fear they will be ostracized at work and among family and friends. Many (gays) say they would rather have people assume without certainty that they are gay than confirm it themselves.

Most Malawians say that even if the law is repealed it will take a very long time for gays to be accepted because social attitudes are so slow to change.

POLITICS-MAURITIUS: Plea for More Female Candidates

(Inter Press Service News Agency)

Feb 18, 2010

PORT-LOUIS , Feb 18 (IPS) - Sandhya Boygah considers herself a victim of male-dominated politics. In 2007, she was asked by her party, the ruling Labour Party, to step aside and allow a man to stand for the elected post she sought.

After long days of intense canvassing; of lobby ministers and even the Prime Minister; and neglecting her family and children, Boygah thought she would be nominated for the post of chairperson of the Pamplemousses/Rivière du Rempart District Council, in northern Mauritius.

"Unfortunately, when the time came the party preferred a man. I was really hurt," she recalled.

She added that she will insist her party nominate her as a candidate for the July elections. (In Mauritius a candidate must be nominated by the leader of their political party before they can stand for elected office. The alternative is to run as an independent candidate.)

It has been three years since Boygah was asked to step aside because of her gender and, while progress has been made towards achieving increased female representation in politics, it remains far too slow for some.

Rights organisations say too few women are being nominated by leaders of political parties as candidates in local, regional and national elections. Of the members of parliament (MPs), only 17 percent (12 out of the 70 members) are women, in municipalities only 11.2 percent of politicians are women. And in the district councils the number is lower, with only 5.2 percent female representation. Though this is an increase from 2005 where only 5.4 percent of MPs were women.

There have been increasing calls to improve female representation in parliament ahead of July's national assembly elections - where members are elected to parliament by voting in multi-member constituencies.

Mauritius currently lags behind the commitment to have '30 female representation in parliament by 2010' it agreed to when it signed the 2005 Southern African Development Community (SADC) Declaration on Gender and Development. The agreement, however, is not binding.

A local non-governmental organisation, Women In Networking (WIN), is circulating a petition calling for increased female representation in parliament. They hope to obtain 50,000 signatures by the end of March when the petition will be handed over to political leaders.

"We want things to change for the upcoming election due later this year," said Paula Atchia, a member of WIN affiliate, Women in Politics (WIP). WIP has asked all political parties to nominate at least one female candidate for every three candidates in each of the 20 constituencies of the island.

Paul Berenger, head of the opposition Mouvement Militant Mauricien, may have promised to nominate a woman as speaker of parliament if his party comes to power in the next election, but WIP is sceptical. "This is not our goal. We want one in three candidates. Let us do it now," Atchia said.

Other rights activists have called for a compulsory quota system to be introduced. "Without a quota, we'll not get enough women as candidates," said Professor Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, Vice-Chancellor at the University of Mauritius.

But this may not happen for a while. While a conservative culture has been partially blamed for lack of female representation in politics, the country's constitution is also hindering transformation.

Mauritius remains one of two countries that have not signed the binding SADC Protocol on Gender and Development – which commits countries to work towards the goal of having 50 percent women in political and decision-making positions by 2015 – because it contradicts the country's constitution. A quota system will contradict the clause in the constitution that promotes equality, experts say.

Nita Kumaree Deerpalsing, an MP from the ruling Labour Party, explained that the concept of gender equality in the constitution means one gender cannot be privileged over another.

"Mauritius subscribes to gender equality and this has been noted in the passing of the Equal Opportunity Act. But some of the clauses of the SADC protocol deal with quotas and when you deal with the Equal Opportunity Act and a society that believes in equality, the quotas then just go against what the nation believes and stands for," Deerpalsing said.

She said Mauritius is a sovereign country with its own laws and government had to be careful how it interprets international codes, such as the SADC protocol. She said any international agreement signed by Mauritius had to comply with the country's laws.

"The problem is legal so it has to be dealt with legally and they have to find gaps to try and solve the issue. The process has already started but will take time to identify the gaps because the constitution is good as a whole," Deerpalsing said.

Loga Virahsawmy, the director of Gender Links (Mauritius and Francophone Office) agreed, adding that the constitution needed to be preserved.

"We have a very good constitution and we cannot amend it because of one article, so we just have to look for ways around the problem," Virahsawmy said.

Deerpalsing said that until this was finalised, political parties had to commit to nominating more women to run for political office.

"The main political parties have to align more women on their lists - that way the number of female MPs can increase. Women across the country have become conscious of the fact that there is low female representation and they are starting to get involved in politics," she said.

Virahsawmy said women in Mauritius wanted to venture into politics and have shown interest through their different political parties. "They are beginning to head committees and (are) taking up more leadership roles," Virahsawmy said.

Rishy Kumar Choony, former chairman of the Moka-Flacq District Council (East), agrees that women have an important role to play in politics.

Choony nominated two women to his 12-member council after he realised they were able to successfully tackle the social problems that affected his village.

He added that many men still believed a woman's place was at home: "Religion and culture have not been very helpful either in taking the women out of their home." He is presently training his 16-year-old daughter in political skills so that she can take his place one day.

Dany Marie, member of Rezistans ek Alternativ, a small political movement, said there still remained certain factors that discouraged women to become involved in politics. One of these, she said, is the fact that most women work in sectors where being active in politics is against employment regulations.

She added that women also worked in areas, like the manufacturing industry and call centres, where the hours are so long and irregular that they had little time for pursuits apart from work and their family responsibilities.

Boygah has called on Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam, who heads the Labour Party, to offer 50 percent of the party's election tickets to women in the next election.

"Is he ready to play such a game?" asked Boygah.

EU's Hedegaard to embark on climate diplomacy tour

(Alert Net)

18 Feb 2010

BRUSSELS, Feb 18 (Reuters) - The European Union's new climate chief, Connie Hedegaard, will soon embark on a climate diplomacy tour to reinvigorate global negotiations after the weak outcome of talks in Copenhagen in December.

The U.N. talks ended with an accord to limit global temperature increases to within 2 degrees Celsius of pre-industrial temperatures, but had little legal clout and no combined vision for cutting climate-warming emissions.

Experts say the emissions cuts pledged alongside the accord set the world on track for a 3.5 degree rise in temperatures.

European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso told EU leaders in a letter on Thursday the bloc needed to find a fresh approach to international climate politics.

"This is not the time for the EU to start doubting its commitments," he wrote. "We need the international process to continue, building on what we could agree in the Copenhagen Accord."

"I have therefore asked Connie Hedegaard, the commissioner for climate action, to undertake a consultation of key international partners to find ways to reinvigorate the international process," he added.

Hedegaard will visit a number of key capitals in the search for alliances including with Africa, China, Brazil, the United States and others, said a spokesman.

Barroso also urged European leaders not to forget their promise to urgently channel 7.3 billion euros (\$9.9 billion) in "climate aid" to poor countries to help them cut emissions from industry and tackle climate impacts on crops.

The EU leaders agreed in December to hand out 2.43 billion euros a year from 2010-2012, to plug the gap until a global deal is struck the the years after 2013. But the Copenhagen talks failed to define channels to distribute that money.

"An important element in this strategy should be the implementation of the fast start financing," Barroso wrote.

"We should not forget that those who were working more closely with us in Copenhagen were the developing countries, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable."

Many European politicians favour more bilateral talks with Africa, after making rapid progress on funding last year when Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi visited Europe on behalf of African Union nations.

Zenawi's deal, however, was savaged by Sudan, which finds itself torn between dealing with the climate threat and nurturing its fast-growing oil industry. (Editing by James Jukwey)

UNAIDS chief begins visit to Southern Africa with stop in Swaziland

(UN News Service)

17 February 2010

17 February 2010 – The head of the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) has called for a greater national response to the disease in Swaziland, which has the highest rate of HIV prevalence in the world, with more than one in every four people infected.

UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé has begun his visit to Southern Africa with a two-day stop in Swaziland to see first-hand the progress and challenges in fighting the spread of HIV/AIDS in a country where the infection rate is 26 per cent.

The wider region is home to two thirds of the world's HIV-positive population.

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) set a target last year of halving new infections in the region by 2010. To meet this goal, the number of projected infections would have to fall from 1.15 million to about 575,000.

Mr. Sidibé plans to see progress made, and explore options for joint UN action to intensify efforts to reduce new HIV infections.

While in Swaziland, Mr. Sidibé met with Prime Minister Barnabas Sibusiso Dlamiani and the country's health and finance ministers, who he urged to continue providing funding to AIDS programmes.

UNAIDS reports that unless efforts are stepped up, three in every 100 people will be infected with HIV every year in Swaziland. In the 25-to-29 age group, one in two women are living with HIV, and so are nearly one in two men aged between 35 and 39.

Mr. Sidibé also commended the King and the Queen Mother for their continued support of the HIV/AIDS effort.

“There is also tangible evidence of progress in the HIV response in Swaziland,” Mr. Sidibé told King Mswati III. “This is particularly evident in the increase of numbers of people, notably pregnant women, who have access to treatment. Almost three out of four pregnant HIV positive women receive antiretroviral drugs to prevent transmitting the virus to their children. This is a significant achievement in Swaziland’s response to HIV.”

Mr. Sidibé concluded his visit by meeting with civil society organisations, including representatives of groups of people living with HIV, women and youth organisations. He urged them to continue working closely with the Government to help mobilize resources and achieve further successes in the response to HIV.

Mr. Sidibé heads next to Botswana and South Africa.

Angola: Optimism On Results of Human Rights Report

(Angola Press)

15 February 2010

Geneva — The Angolan delegation to the 7th session of the Universal Periodical Review (UPR), a UN human rights monitoring mechanism, is optimistic about the results of the debate on its report on the last development of human rights in Angola to be issued Tuesday.

Presenting the report on Friday, the Angolan secretary of state for external relations, George Chicoty, ensured that Angola is now a different country in terms of promotion and protection of the rights of its citizens.

According to Mr Chicoty, Angola is starting now a new cycle marked by the proclamation of a new Constitution which ends the transitional period and establishes the rule of law and a democratic state, after the experiences lived in different periods of the Angolan history.

He stressed the UPR importance as a forum of international cooperation allowing the self-evaluation, strengthening of institutional capacity and the creation of objective conditions to improve human rights conditions.

He admitted that there are many things still to be done in the fields of development financing but stated that the fairer and clearer the laws can be, there are things that need time to be done.

The Angolan government report deserved recognition from the member states for the progress achieved in short time of peace with particular emphasis to poverty reduction, strengthening of democracy, education and the representativity of women in different sectors of the society, namely in parliament.

The Angolan newly proclaimed constitution was commended by some countries which recommended Angola to proceed with its initiatives in order to adapt the legal system to the new constitution.

Canada, India, Ireland, Egypt and Korea considered the new constitution a guarantee of stability and democracy allowing a better protection of citizens rights and other countries urged Angola to strengthen the combat of violence against woman, child sexual exploitation, the situation of so-called witch kids, adequate housing and to accelerate the process of adhesion to some international treaties on human rights.

Kenya: Bad Maize From SA to Be Destroyed

(Daily Nation On The Web)

15 February 2010

Nairobi — More than 30,000 bags of contaminated maize held by the National Cereals and Produce Board at its Embu depot will be destroyed on Friday.

The maize, according to Public Health minister Beth Mugo who made the announcement on Monday, is part of a consignment imported under the scandal-riddled subsidy scheme in 2008.

While the bulk of the contaminated maize was reshipped to South Africa where it originated, Mrs Mugo said, part of the consignment had found its way into the market.

"I raised the red flag that some of the contaminated maize had found its way into the market but some people denied it. Sadly, it was the truth," she said, adding that she would lead the destruction of the bad maize.

Tests have confirmed that the consignment contained the highest aflatoxin levels ever found in the country, the minister said. Aflatoxin is a poison that causes cancer.

The ministry went to court last year to have the maize declared unfit for human consumption but the cereals board appealed against the orders.

The appeal was however thrown out and the ministry given the green light to destroy the cereal.

Two permanent secretaries, senior managers at the cereals board and an official in the Prime Minister's office have been suspended over the maize subsidy scandal.

Mrs Mugo called on Prime Minister Raila Odinga to resign too for irregular award of tenders to firms that imported the maize.

Account

Mr Odinga, she said, had to account for his role as the chair of the Cabinet sub-committee on food security. It is this committee that cleared Afrigil Pty of South Africa, which won the sole rights to import subsidised maize.

Others in the committee included Trade minister Amos Kimunya, then acting Finance minister John Michuki, Agriculture minister William Ruto and Special Programmes minister Naomi Shaban.

Angola: Policies to Promote Citizenship Assured

(Angola Press Agency)

15 February 2010

Luanda — The Ministry of Assistance and Social Welfare (MINARS) will consider as priorities during the third Republic, contributing with policies and programmes aimed at promoting citizenship in order to provide good living conditions to the needy.

The intention was expressed Friday by the incumbent minister, João Baptista Kussumua, at the Social Welfare Ministry's headquarters, during the first official meeting held with its closest partners, after his re-election to the post made on February 05 by the Head of State, José Eduardo dos Santos.

According to government official, all workers need to recognise that more than a recognition to the work carried out over the past years, the decision of President José Eduardo dos Santos represents his confidence in the capacity of innovation of all employees and institutions of the sector.

"In this new context, the ministry assumes a more strategic importance due the impact and influence of its actions in the present and future of each citizen", he added.

Namibia: Are We Serious About Job Creation?

(The Namibian)

16 February 2010

A few contradictory headlines about Namibia's labour situation made me sit up and cringe.

The Namibian recently reported that the Namibia Labour Force Survey 2008 puts unemployment at 51 per cent. It was also revealed that the Labour Minister has sat on this report since September 2009. Who could blame him? No one would want to reveal such damning evidence of one's own failure, so close to elections! Especially if your party is in the habit of boasting how many thousands of jobs it would create once it is elected even though they've not yet done anything substantial to make good on their lofty promises.

Insight Namibia magazine in its latest edition tells a disgusting tale of how Jerry Ekandjo used his political muscle to cow the Otjozondjupa Regional Council into paying a former Chief Regional Officer well over N\$200 000 and reappoint her just as her house was about to be repossessed. He wrote a string of letters directing the council to pay up or face expulsion from their plush positions. This, while there was a court case pending in which the former CRO is accused of a misappropriating funds at both the Regional Council and at her previous employer, the Gender Ministry, where she allegedly took N\$26 000 of donor funding for herself. She was supposed to attend a workshop but did

not go. This fact, however, did not deter her from writing a report for the Minister on the meeting in question!

These two cases show exactly where the priorities of our decision-makers lie. While one out of every two Namibians is left helpless, frustrated and hungry next to the roads, the people we employ to make sound decisions on our behalf (at great cost to us) use their office to help dubious individuals close to them acquire tenders and get their hands on public assets and their bums onto seats that they are not fit to occupy.

It is clear that our leaders have no sense of the responsibility entrusted to them, or they would have had a detailed plan to deal with unemployment. For a long time unemployment was thought to be around 36 per cent. Even that horrendous statistic never seemed to bother our leaders as I can think of no clear and credible plan implemented, with urgency, to mitigate a further slump. The few half-hearted attempts at job creation were always fraught with political meddling and official bungling.

While there aren't many jobs going around there is no plan to assist the unemployed with a proper safety net with social grants. Up to now the powers-that-be have stubbornly refused to consider the much vaunted Basic Income Grant and their affiliates (NUNW) have so far failed to convince them.

The current unemployment rate in the US hovers around 10 per cent and it is seen as a disaster. In contrast, with half the nation jobless we do not even get a dignified response from the man in charge of this calamity. While the Minister was "busy with other things" our people are left with no dignity and no hope and all they are good for is to make a cross come election time. The Minister's priority is to cling onto his and his party's position as our rulers, forgetting why he is occupying the position in the first place.

Instead of getting people off the streets, Government strategies and lack of urgency in dealing with the problem have caused the army of unemployed to swell even further with their flawed education system. Government failed to build enough properly equipped vocational centres and train young people in technical fields to equip them with skills so they don't end up in a dead-end street without any hope of getting out of the poverty trap.

To compound the situation we import hordes of Asian construction workers and dish out all Government construction work to companies owned by them. The Tender Board only recently decided that all semi-skilled and unskilled workers must be "sourced from Namibia". Does this mean that the current throng of Chinese and Korean bricklayers also qualify because they are already in Namibia and have probably some sort of dubious documentation that would qualify them? But this will not be enforced as there is no political will to ensure our people's needs are prioritised.

Unemployment should be gauged more frequently so Government can plan and devise corrective measures. And if the situation worsens because plans did not work out or were not implemented, heads must roll.

Sadly, no one will fall on the sword because there were no plans to alleviate the situation to start with. Ask any minister what his plans are for his ministry and he would say that

he is there to carry out the instructions of the party and the president. So, if I don't make plans I can't be held responsible if they don't pan out. Nice job, if you can get it!

Of course, employment creation is not only Government's job but they are responsible for effective policies and a conducive climate for business to thrive in and employ locals. I think that poorly thought-out and deficient planning and short-sightedness won't help at all.

When will we see action that shows us our Government put its people first?

Mali frees al Qaeda prisoners in hostage swap – report

(Alert Net)

20 Feb 2010

BAMAKO, Feb 20 (Reuters) - Mali authorities have released four Islamist prisoners in an apparent deal with al Qaeda's north African wing to save a French hostage, according to a Mali newspaper report.

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) had said France and Mali would be "responsible" for the life of Pierre Camatte, who was kidnapped in Mali in November, unless Bamako released the Islamist prisoners by Feb. 20.

A report in Mali's Independent newspaper on Friday said a court in Bamako had sentenced the four prisoners -- who were captured by security forces in April -- on Thursday morning only to the time they had already served, tantamount to a release.

Government officials were not immediately available to comment Saturday morning.

AQIM has also claimed responsibility for the abduction of three Spaniards and an Italian couple. There was no immediate word on Saturday on the fate of Camatte or other hostages.

The group emerged in 2007 from the Salafist GSPC movement which battled Algerian security forces during the 1990s.

Last year it killed a British hostage and analysts say the group is interested as much in securing multi-million dollar ransom payments as it is in political goals.

AQIM has waged a campaign of suicide bombings and ambushes in Algeria but in the past few years has shifted a large part of its activities south to the Sahara desert.

Some western governments believe that al Qaeda-linked fighters and drug smugglers -- using the politically volatile and sparsely populated Sahara as a safe haven -- are forging ties which could make both groups a more potent threat.

The United States and European nations are seeking to improve the capacity of the Sahara-region states to combat the threat but disputes among regional governments have hampered efforts to mount a coordinated response.

South Africa: Africagate is No Scandal Say IPCC Authors

(West Cape News)

15 February 2010

The latest 'Africagate' controversy and criticism over the use of 'grey literature' in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fourth Assessment Report does not undermine climate change science, say IPCC authors.

The latest controversy dubbed 'Africagate' by climate change sceptics - relates to a statement contained in the IPCC's Fourth Assessment Report (FAR) Africa chapter which also appears in the key Synthesis Report in the following form: "By 2020, in some countries, yields from rain-fed agriculture could be reduced by up to 50%".

Sceptics have attacked it's veracity due to it emerging from a single report which has not undergone a rigorous scientific peer review process.

It is the latest in a number of such statements in the FAR which have their roots in non-peer reviewed - termed 'grey' - literature which have been pulled apart on blogs openly critical of climate change science.

Others include a statement that Himalayan glacial ice will melt by 2035 and that 40% of the Amazon rainforests will be lost due to global warming.

It is fuel to the fire after the damaging 'climategate' leaked email saga in which hacked emails from the University of East Anglia's Climatic Research Unit were latched onto by climate change sceptics as evidence of collusion by scientists to manipulate data.

Director of the Climatic Research Unit, Professor Phil Jones, stepped down for a full investigation into the matter to take place, and has denied the sceptic's claims.

Now 'Africagate' has put more gas in the sceptic's tank, especially since the '50% less food by 2020' statement has been repeated on the world stage by IPCC chair Rajendra Pachauri and picked up as a catchphrase by environmental NGOs

Although the IPCC as a body has not yet responded to the matter, sceptics, commenting on popular blogs, say the claim emerged from a review produced by Canadian based advocacy group the International Institute for Sustainable Development and, in terms of the statement in question, applied only to one finding in Morocco.

Sceptic Richard North, who writes on the blog EUReferendum, says the '50% by 2020' claim is, "at best", a "wild exaggeration, unsupported by any scientific research, referenced only to a report produced by a Canadian advocacy group, written by an obscure Moroccan academic who specialises in carbon trading, citing references".

The criticism on his and other blogs such as wattsupwiththat.com and climategate.com, are vicious, with most voices clamouring for Pachauri's head.

But South African IPCC lead authors, although speaking in their personal capacity, have defended both the 'Africagate' claim and the inclusion of grey literature in the FAR.

Contributing lead authors of the FAR Africa chapter, Professor Coleen Vogel, said the contentious statement was rooted in work done by Professor in meteorology, Ali Agoumi, for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) First National Communication.

Agoumi's research focused on Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, and, said Vogel came under rigorous scrutiny by her fellow authors.

It was also debated in Brussels when the FAR was put to the almost 200 member countries, and was subject to caveats and was footnoted.

"If people are now extrapolating that (statement) and not going back to the original chapter, there's nothing I can do about it."

As for criticism of the inclusion of grey literature, she said a paucity of peer reviewed material relating to some parts of the world, particularly Africa, necessitated its inclusion in order to provide balanced information.

But all grey literature was noted and its sources revealed in the FAR.

In fact, said Dr Guy Midgley, IPCC coordinating lead author of the FAR chapter four on ecosystems, the inclusion of a broader literature base than what was included only in top peer reviewed journals was an injunction given by the IPCC to the authors of the fourth report.

"Some of these reports were enormously valuable", said Midgley, who is also Chief Specialist Scientist at the South African National Biodiversity Institute (Sanbi).

"The idea was that these non-peer reviewed articles were a valuable resource, especially in the developing world", where a "more balanced data set was required".

In theory, this was a good injunction, but it had a rider that an extra level of rigour in the checking of sources was required.

"In our chapter we've had to scan and lodge every example of grey reports with the IPCC."

This resulted in a high level of transparency, he said, as all sources could be tracked back, as well as being able to track every one of the tens of thousands of responses by author teams to reviewers' comments.

And both Vogel and Midgley, rather than being on the defensive, expressed surprise at the length of time it has taken people to interrogate the FAR, given that it was published in 2007.

"It's extraordinary that it's (the interrogation of data) taken this long," said Midgley, adding "but it's great the report is put under this level of scrutiny."

However, while both scientists said the identification of errors was necessary, it was equally important to recognise the accuracy contained in the vast plethora of data contained in the report's 3000 pages.

SOUTH AFRICA: Increase in Social Grants Will Benefit Children

(IPS)

Feb 19,2010

CAPE TOWN , Feb 19 (IPS) - South Africa's children, the country's most vulnerable population group, will benefit through the increase in social grants recently outlined in the national budget.

South Africa's finance minister, Pravin Gordhan's national budget speech on Feb. 17 has largely been met with approval by development experts for the social grant increases.

Experts say children will benefit in two ways - through the increase of the Child Support Grant (CSG) as well as the old age pension, which has shown to have a positive knock-on effect for the livelihoods of all members of a family.

The CSG increased to 32.7 dollars per month and was extended to include children up to 18 years, while previously only caregivers of children up to 15 years qualified. At the same time, the old age pension was raised by 9 dollars to 141 dollars per month.

"This move shows government's ongoing commitment to its extensive system of social grants and that social grants have become part of the country's development orthodoxy," believes David Neves, researcher at the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies of the University of the Western Cape.

"Although it is not much of an increase in monetary terms, it is an improvement, especially because the CSG will include many more children due to the higher age threshold," he adds.

The age extension means that caregivers of about 2.4 million more poor children will be able to access the grant, according to calculations by the South African Children's Institute, which will help them feed, clothe, house and educate their children.

The latest Department of Social Development statistics show that more than 12.8 million children benefited from the CSG at the end of January 2009.

Regional Hunger and Vulnerability Project policy advisor Josee Koch agrees with Neves that the increase in monthly grant payments can generally be described as a positive development, but questions what impact it will have on individual recipients.

"Although in terms of fiscal increase it's a significant amount of money, the extra R10 (1.3 dollars) per CSG recipient will be quickly eaten up with very basic necessities," she reckons. "If you take inflation into account, it's virtually no increase at all."

However, Koch suggests that in the currently difficult financial times caused by the global economic downturn, it makes sense to spend cautiously. "The South African government is conservative in its financial approach this year, but it nonetheless has shown a sign of support of poor households," she says. "Such an approach will benefit us in the long run."

Grants have been playing an important role in redistributing wealth in South Africa and proven to be successful in reducing some of the income inequality. "Although concerns about the misuse of cash transfers keeps coming up, all our evidence suggests that it's not true," says Neves.

Quite the opposite is the case, he argues. Grants soften the effects of poverty by improving children's health, reducing malnutrition and enabling better access to schooling, among other benefits.

Children whose parents receive the CSG are on average two centimeters taller than those who do not, says Koch. This indicates that grant recipients truly spend the extra money on more and better food, because stunting is one of the main results of malnutrition.

Moreover, households that receive a pension have a 12 percent higher work participation rate, Koch explains, which points to the fact that cash transfers free up family members to look for work – and if household income increases, children are generally better off, too.

"Families know very well what they need to spend the grant on. It's important for people to make their own spending choices. The fact that you are poor doesn't mean you are stupid," highlights Koch. "Cash transfers are very empowering and have shown to motivate recipients to break the cycle of poverty."

There is another positive side effect to social grants – increasing poor people's spending power stimulates the local economy. "For every Rand (0.13 dollars) you pay out in social grants, you gain three Rands (0.4 dollars) in local economy," notes Koch.

Still, there is a lot more that could be done to make sure South African children and teenagers are ensured their rights to education, health and a happy childhood. Social grants are only truly effective if they link into well-working public health and education systems, so that poor children can attend schools and access health care in the same way than their better-off peers.

"That's where the state falls short in delivery. Our health and education systems are fairly inefficient, and 250 Rands (32.7 dollars) a month don't make up for that," says Neves.

But when comparing South Africa's welfare system with that of other developing countries in the region, such as Lesotho or Malawi, South Africa is clearly the country whose government is making the strongest commitment to social grants.

"This shows that the South African government is on track. Comparatively, its welfare system is fairly proficient," believes George Laryea-Adjel, chief of social policy and economics at the United Nations Children's Fund in South Africa. "There are challenges in some areas, but government is trying hard to decrease operational bottlenecks through action plans and expanding capacity."

Despite the good intentions, the positive trend of expanding the social welfare net might not last forever. "Grants have increased rapidly in recent years (since South Africa became a democracy in 1994), but we can't continue expanding endlessly. We might get to a point where grants will plateau," cautions Neves.

This means that more sustainable ways to alleviate poverty need to be pushed – the main one being job creation. "Creating jobs is a crucial instrument to reduce the number of people who need grants. It should be a priority and be pursued aggressively," says Laryea-Adjel.

This will not happen overnight, he warns. "Transformation is going to take a while. In the meantime, we need the social security system."

South Africa: Police Visibility Reduces Crime – Expert

(Bua News)

14 February 2010

Pretoria — Police visibility is a deterrent of crime, says a senior researcher at the Institute of Security Studies (ISS).

Crime and Justice Programme senior researcher, Dr Johan Burger, was reacting to President Jacob Zuma's State of the Nation Address in which Zuma said the number of police would increase by 10 percent.

"We are implementing plans to increase the number of police men and women by 10 percent over the next three years," said Zuma.

The President added that government had identified the fight against hijacking, business and house robberies, as well as contact crimes such as murder, rape, and assault as top priorities.

Burger said reducing serious and violent crimes and ensuring that the justice system works efficiently would only be achieved by increasing police visibility on the streets.

He said Zuma's announcement was not something new as government had in the past few years set a target of employing 204 000 police by 2011/2012.

"This is a continuation of a programme that was developed some years ago and this is a good move as it will make the country one of the best in the world in terms of fighting crime.

"We must be excited about the increasing number of police personnel, but we must expect a more improved service in the investigation, detective and flying squad units," the researcher said.

Asked if the police ministry should use automatic integration in hiring police reservists, Burger said police reservists should be appointed on an individual assessment basis, a sentiment also shared by police ministry spokesperson Zweli Mnisi.

Mnisi told BuaNews that increasing police personnel will unfold in three phases which include an individual assessment of police reservists, recruitment of new police trainees and re-hiring former members who are still interested to be re-enlisted in the South African Police Service.

"With regard to the appointment of police reservists, we want to make it clear that there would be no automatic integration of police reservists into the SAPS, what will happen is that they will be assessed individually and those who meet the requirements will be taken to the police training college," he said.

Samson Mphilo deputy chairperson of the Makhado SAPS Community Policing Forum in Limpopo said although increasing the number of police is a good move, ten percent over the next three years was not enough.

"We thought maybe they will increase the number by 15 percent... however, ten percent is better than nothing," he said.

Business Against Crime South Africa (BACSA) said they supported the prioritisation of crimes such as hijacking, business and house robberies, as well as contact crimes such as murder, rape and assault.

CEO of BACSA, Dr Graham Wright said: "These actions, as well as plans to increase the number of police men and women by ten percent over the next three years, are welcomed as they will help to build confidence in the law enforcement agencies and the justice system as a whole."

South African Police Union (SAPU) president, Mpho Nkwini said increasing the number of police is beside the point, as what is important is to have police officers with the capacity to effectively deal with criminal activities that are confronting the country.

"What is important is how you manage what is at your disposal best. If we are increasing the number of police, we need to ensure that the new recruits will provide effective and quality service to the people," he said.

South Africa: Education Budget Gets R17 Billion Hike

(Bua News)

17 February 2010

Cape Town — Education continued to receive the lion's share of the country's budget with Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan on Wednesday announcing an allocation of R165 billion to the Basic Education and Higher Education departments for the next financial year.

This is up by more than R17 billion as compared to the previous year.

A further R2.7 billion will be made available to the Department of Basic Education for the roll-out of workbooks in all 11 official languages to help raise numeracy levels in Grades 3, 6 and 9.

Delivering his maiden Budget Speech in the National Assembly, Gordhan said while government spending needed to be kept in check, education remained the number one priority in the country's fiscus.

The R2.7 billion funding is expected to assist the Department of Basic Education address serious challenges in the schooling system.

These include findings that South Africa's numeracy and literacy levels for school children were unacceptably low despite a high level of spending in education over the past 15 years.

Challenges within the system include poor management, inadequately trained teachers, insufficient time for tasks and a lack of basic resources in poor schools.

Low levels of achievement in science, mathematics and languages have also been identified.

The workbooks in schools will help teachers to map out clear plans and guide effective use of the curriculum.

An annual R28 million is being provided for national assessments of literacy and numeracy for Grades 3, 6 and 9.

These assessments, announced by President Jacob Zuma in his State of the Nation Address last week, will measure performance and allow educators and parents to make the necessary interventions to enhance performance. This is to prevent more dismal matric failures in some schools.

Further Education and Training colleges will receive R12 billion and a further R1.3 billion has been set aside to improve salaries of educators in the sector over the next three years.

Government says it will also use the R12 billion to promote higher training standards to meet the requirements of a changing economy while also addressing the lack of training in certain skills areas.

South Africa's lack of skilled labour is said to hamper economic growth as twice as many students are enrolled in universities as are enrolled in vocational colleges while in many other countries this ratio is reversed.

Existing skills training programmes are often inadequate to support the needs of individuals and the economy.

Allocations to higher education institutions have grown from R7.1 billion in 2001/02 to R15.3 billion this year.

An additional R1 billion is provided over the next three years to increase subsidies to universities while R5.6 billion will go to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme.

Spending by provincial education departments is also expected to grow by 8.1 percent per year to R162 billion over the next three years to ensure the system responds to the educational needs of all learners.