

Report # 115

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Summary of Report

Political Developments

South Africa: The next frontier for land occupations?

For many South Africa will be the next frontier for land invasions. The situation there is a ticking time bomb, the author says. There's a system of extreme injustice and poverty across the country that cannot be sustained, he concludes.

AU Chief Says Madagascar Sanctions Undermined By Big Powers

African Union Commission Chief Jean Ping says AU sanctions against Madagascar's leaders are being undermined by the permanent members of the UN Security Council. Sudan and Somalia were also on Mr. Ping's agenda during a news briefing at AU headquarters.

Zimbabwe celebrates 30 years of independence

Zimbabwe is marking 30 years since independence from the UK. Celebrations include all-night song and dance performances in the capital, Harare, and a speech by President Robert Mugabe in the city's stadium.

Zimbabwe President Mugabe denies company law U-turn

Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe has denied that a controversial Zimbabwean law is to be shelved. President Mugabe said reports that the "indigenisation law" would be suspended were "completely false", and instead a cabinet committee was merely studying the law to improve it.

Constitutional process hits snag

Zimbabwe's constitution-making process has been derailed after donors delayed releasing funds for the process. This caused the first stage, of deploying outreach programme teams, to be abandoned last week.

Little joy for 30-year-old Zimbabwe

Zimbabweans celebrated when a bloody liberation war that killed 27,000 people ended, but as the country marks 30 years of independence there is little cause for joy.

Mbeki joins hostage talks

Former president Thabo Mbeki has been roped into urgent diplomatic negotiations aimed at securing the release of four South African police peacekeepers kidnapped in war-torn Darfur.

Mugabe admits demise of education system

Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe has admitted that teachers earn "a mere pittance" and pledged to restore the quality of the country's education system, state media said.

Madagascar army gives president end-April deadline

Madagascar's army has given President Andry Rajoelina until the end of April to offer an acceptable way out of the 13-month political crisis on the Indian Ocean island, a military source said on Monday.

Madagascar leader to disband govt, form new one

Madagascar's leader has vowed to disband his internationally rejected government and form an interim body with an ousted opposition leader following an ultimatum from the army to solve a festering crisis.

UNHCR protests to Zambia about deportation of 36 Congolese refugees

The UN refugee agency on Tuesday protested to the Zambian government over the recent expulsions of 36 refugees to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

UN agency urges Zambia to halt deportation of refugees

The United Nations refugee agency today urged the Zambian Government to halt the expulsion of refugees and asylum-seekers to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) after 36 individuals were recently sent back.

Economic Developments

Angola receives UN aid to help foster investment

The United Nations, which sent four separate missions to Angola during its devastating decades-long civil war in efforts to help end the conflict, is seeking to strengthen the capacities of the now peaceful southern African country in the field of investment.

Zimbabwe's new farmers defend their gains

Under President Robert Mugabe's land reform programme, some 4,000 white farmers have been driven away and their land given to black farmers. The BBC's Dan Isaacs talks to Zimbabwe's new farming class. And this talk reveals that new farmers defend their gains.

ZIMBABWE: EU and U.S. Exhibitors Stay Far Away from Trade Fair

Companies from the European Union and the U.S. will not feature at this year's Zimbabwe International Trade Fair despite the formation of a government of national unity last year.

Angola: Oil Wealth Eludes Nation's Poor

The government of Angola has not done enough to combat pervasive corruption and mismanagement, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today. Even though the oil-rich country's gross domestic product has increased by more than 400 percent in the last six years, Angolans are not seeing their lives improve accordingly, Human Rights Watch said.

Pirates seize cargo ship off Seychelles

Pirates seized a Saint Vincent and the Grenadines flagged merchant ship off the coast of the Seychelles on Sunday, the EU naval force said.

Zimbabwe Suspends Company Take Overs by Blacks

Zimbabwe's Cabinet has postponed the regulations for domestic and foreign companies to submit plans to hand 51 percent of shares to black Zimbabweans. The decision is a triumph for Movement for Democratic Change legislators.

Social Developments

African nations meet to boost disaster risk reduction at UN-backed forum

Delegates from 42 countries in Africa, which along with Asia is the most vulnerable continent to disasters, kicked off a United Nations-backed meeting in Nairobi today to discuss ways to make their communities and citizens safer.

NAMIBIA: Banking Water for the Future

In the driest capital city south of the Sahara, water engineers are "banking" ground water to meet future demand, but the enormous costs might sink the project before water can be harvested.

Ten things we have learnt about Africa

The Pew Research Center has just released one of the biggest ever studies on attitudes to religion and morality in Africa, which has revealed a host of interesting facts. Here are 10 things that BBC has learnt from the study, which surveyed 25,000 people in 19 countries.

1. 75% of South Africans think polygamy is "morally wrong"
2. An overwhelming majority of respondents disapproved of homosexual behaviour.
3. Africa is probably the world's most religious continent, with more than 80% saying they believed in God in most countries.
4. Zimbabwe, where the Lemba people say they are the lost tribe of Israel but 26% of Nigerian Christians said they traced their origins back to Israel or Palestine.
5. Belief in witchcraft is also common - about 40%; a similar percentage also visit traditional healers to cure sickness.
6. Predictably, there was also a religious split concerning alcohol, banned by Islam.
7. Attitudes to divorce showed a strong divide along religious lines in Nigeria. A massive 79% of Christians thought it was "morally wrong", while among Muslims, a narrow majority (46-41%) accepted divorce.
8. In recent years, Islamist hardliners in Somalia and Nigeria have introduced strict punishment based on Sharia law, such as amputating the hands of thieves and even stoning to death for adultery. The majority of people disapproved of such Sharia punishments.
9. The survey also asked about material well-being in the world's poorest continent.
10. Ethiopia did, however, have the lowest numbers of people - 7% - who said they regularly used the internet.

Detentions Extended for South African Murder Suspects

A South African court says two farm workers accused of killing a white supremacist leader will remain in custody until at least next month.

SOUTH AFRICA: Drinking the fog

South Africa is one of the top 30 water-scarce countries in the world, and 60 percent of the country is semi-arid. So to overcome this problem they harvest water from fog, store it and then that water is supplied in most of mountainous municipalities. The process of harvesting water from fog was originated in South Africa in 1901 and is now used in many mountainous regions across the world.

ZAMBIA: Unruly refugees sent home

A shadow has fallen over Zambia's long history of generously hosting refugees from troubled countries since 36 foreigners were deported to neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), but the government says it is only trying to ensure security and order in camps that still shelter some 57,000 people.

MALAWI: Clinics dispel male circumcision myths

Male circumcision (MC), which can reduce HIV among men by up to 60 percent, is controversial in Malawi and government has yet to implement mass male circumcision. But a chain of private clinics has rolled out the measure with some surprising results.

S. Africa looks to sea to meet growing water demand

South Africa will increasingly use desalinated seawater to meet growing demand for drinking water in coastal towns facing the worst drought in 150 years, the country's water minister said on Thursday.

ZIMBABWE: Worrying rise in STIs among young people

A new report by Zimbabwe's National AIDS Council (NAC), showing a dramatic rise in sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among people aged 15 to 24 in the capital, Harare, has health experts worried that the country's success in reducing HIV could be unravelling.

SOUTH AFRICA: Racist's Death Highlights Rural Tension

Eugene Terre'Blanche (white supremacist leader), killed on his farm on Easter weekend, is catalyzing racial tension in South Africa in death much as he did in his life.

Spotlight on Human Trafficking Before World Cup in South Africa

As South Africa prepares to host the FIFA 2010 World Cup, international organizations and local non-governmental organizations are warning the event will bring with it a huge increase in human trafficking. But a recent study indicates that while the problem is severe it may not be as extensive as has been suggested.

Detailed Report

Political Developments

South Africa: The next frontier for land occupations?

(Africa Files)

15 April 2010

In 2001, I was a politically naive young Zimbabwean immigrant living in the slums of Johannesburg when, as a member of a local civic group, we got wind of an impending eviction of 'squatters' who had illegally occupied a piece of land on the outskirts of Johannesburg called Bredell. When we arrived at the impending eviction, the battle lines were already drawn; international media organisations, the likes of CNN, BBC, etc. had already raised their satellite dishes, poised to beam dramatic scenes of 'squatters' being evicted to the world. It looked as if many of us in attendance at this sombre event had come to witness a public hanging. Desperate land occupiers waited nervously holding their line.

Before noon, the wretched 'land grabbers' found themselves facing the 'evil' realities of the new South Africa. Makeshift homes constructed with tin and cardboard in a quest to have somewhere they could call home were demolished on camera.

Although a few of us who had come to witness this obscene event tried to provide support by waving our 'socialist' flags and singing freedom songs, the eviction went ahead. Troops of black security guards wearing red boiler suits, locally known as 'Rooi Gevaar', demolished the land occupier's homes and forcefully removed helpless women and children. It was an ugly experience; I felt like I was witnessing a woman being raped but with no means to help her. One elderly woman took off her clothes in protest, an act with a deep cultural meaning, as the nudity of an old woman is supposed to bring a curse to its onlookers. Whether those who evicted her were later befallen by misfortune, nobody knows.

As we all stood helplessly watching the demolition, we wondered about the logic of South Africa's liberation. How could a government voted into power by poor and disenfranchised people forcefully evict them in the name of private property? Given the international news cameras, it seemed the South African government wanted as much publicity as possible for the eviction in order to demonstrate its commitment to the protection of private property; South Africa wanted to send the right signal to the markets that Zimbabwean-style land 'invasions' were not allowed here. The South African minister of land had earlier told the media that 'land grabbing' was not welcome; property rights were as sacred as the republic's constitution.

Those who illegally occupied farms would be forcefully removed. The ‘Bredell land grab,’ as the mainstream media called it, and the subsequent publicity it generated unmasked something sinister about post apartheid South Africa; it revealed the double standards within the leadership of the African National Congress (ANC).

While the ANC elites continue to make promises to the poor, the Bredell eviction saga demonstrated that the ANC government was more interested in calming nervous white land owners and foreign investors than addressing the root causes of landlessness and social injustice, steeped in the country’s apartheid history. What made this very public eviction saga more depressing was that the ANC, with its close trade union linkages, had for many years fought against apartheid policies like the 1913 Land Act which eventually gave three quarters of arable land to Whites and the subsequent eviction of ‘native’ South Africans to the so called ‘Homelands’.

Moreover, the ANC came to power in 1994 after a landslide victory with promises of reversing apartheid era injustices based on the moral principles of the Freedom Charter. Many blacks saw the release of Mandela and the subsequent elections of 1994, which led to a free South Africa, as a new dawn. However, the Bredell eviction demonstrated that post-apartheid South Africa had a long way to go in addressing apartheid-era injustices.

What we witnessed on this day was not a one-off event. Besides landlessness, blacks in the new South Africa face all forms of social injustices: Poor sanitation, unemployment, homelessness, and electricity and water cut-offs – the list is unending. Many civic groups have now been formed in order to deliver all forms of parallel social services to the poor, including reconnecting water and electricity for those disconnected due to failure to pay escalating bills. The poor no longer rely on the government for social services, but on each other for their survival.

South Africa remains a very strange place, a divided society. The transition from apartheid to majority rule involved what Patrick Bond called ‘elite transition’, for the beneficiaries of the new South Africa are indeed few and mostly white. In some places one gets a feeling that there are two countries in one – a small Mediterranean archipelago with beautiful bungalows perched on hilltops, whites-only beaches where blacks are there to serve the rich; the other a stereotypical African country with overcrowded slums, high unemployment, petty thieves and petty commodity brokers living on the edge. Extreme poverty and extreme wealth live side by side in the new South Africa.

Blacks have been reduced to a life of shameless grabbing of virtually everything for survival. Basic mobile phones, wedding rings and all small jewellery can attract violent robbers – even a pair of Nike shoes in inner city areas like Hillbrow can attract muggers. The situation has not been helped by a high influx of immigrants from neighbouring countries flocking to South Africa in search of what seems like a paranoiac gold rush. This has resulted in dangerous levels of intolerance and xenophobia, which reached a breaking point last year when poor and dispossessed South Africans vented their anger on the easy scapegoat of illegal immigrants. The Rainbow Nation, glamorised by the iconic images of a free Mandela, has become a very dangerous place.

Hordes of poor slum dwellers have no option but to resort to ‘affirmative action’ – the violent recovery of property from whites. Robberies have now forced many whites and the rich of all colours to live in homes that look like fortresses, fitted with state of the art security alarms, armed response, electric fences, burglar-proof gates, CCTV, neighbourhood watches, etc. It has become dangerous to be rich in South Africa. A home has to be barricaded to avoid marauding robbers; many South African homes now look more like American embassies protected against potential terrorist attacks.

Dangerously armed robbers lurk in the dark waiting to pounce on unsuspecting rich people; those who have been fortunate enough to enjoy the comforts afforded to them by the Rainbow Nation, courtesy of Mandela’s reconciliation legacy. South Africa’s inability to deal with repressed apartheid-era anger among blacks is a reason for concern. Politicians have glossed over the past by promoting an ideal image of a Rainbow Nation to lure foreign investors, while beneath the surface a simmering storm of discontent brews. Repressed anger manifests itself in the form of violence by unemployed blacks killing each in the battle for survival. With no work and no sense of dignity, masculinity among the poor is expressed through gun violence.

The main victims of this violence are vulnerable women; South Africa has one of the highest incidences of rape in the world, and many of the victims of this rape end up infected with HIV, creating a vicious cycle of poverty and sickness in black neighbourhoods. This repressed apartheid-era anger has yet to find a proper exit; until it does, the ghosts of apartheid will continue to haunt South Africa in the near future.

Apartheid-era racial attitudes are more openly reflected in South Africa’s rural farming areas. Here the laws of the jungle apply. White vigilante groups deliver rough justice to poor blacks working in these rural enclaves, where changes in racial attitudes formed during the apartheid era are hardening instead of changing. Not long ago a farmer did the unexpected, killing a black farm worker by tying him behind the back of his truck and then driving along a gravel road for stealing tomatoes. What gave this farmer the confidence to commit this horrendous crime is that the end of apartheid was negotiated, and Nelson Mandela’s reconciliatory policies failed to dismantle the apparatus of apartheid. No wonder many of the rich love him and his legacy; history is yet to judge this iconic figure fully.

The recent killing of Eugene Terreblanche, the self-confessed white supremacist leader of the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) by his farm workers demonstrates the battles that lie ahead. Although politicians in South Africa have down played Terreblanche’s murder as a one-off non-political event, his violent end is a significant political event that is likely to expose simmering racial tensions in South Africa’s rural farming enclaves. An estimated 3,000 White farmers have so far been murdered; this number is likely to increase, as battles for racial justice are likely to intensify in the future. Political leadership is required to channel black grievances if an open bloodbath is to be avoided in the near future.

In many racial enclaves it is still business as usual, as propertied elites use the law to protect their property from forceful acquisition. This quest to preserve their property is supported by the logic of neo liberal capitalism, which the ANC government overzealously adopted in its macro-economic policy formulation. The fear of a Zimbabwean style capital flight or a great exodus of investors is a reality that South African policy makers have been keen to avoid. A result of the above is that the poor have been sacrificed on the altar of the international markets; those who suffered during apartheid continue to live in poverty, while wealth remains in the hands of whites and a few black elites, beneficiaries of the so-called black empowerment.

Behind the hullabaloo of freedom lies the naked truth about post apartheid South Africa – that millions of blacks continue to suffer the vagaries of injustice, unemployment, homelessness, and landlessness. Although South Africa supports a policy of land restitution, the process of land claims gets stuck in bureaucratic processes, with some communities simply giving up, as they have no capacity to interpret the law and have limited access to legal aid. Many people who lost their land during apartheid-era ‘black sports clearances’ are still waiting to recover stolen property. This situation is likely to explode in the future.

The government’s mainly market-driven land reform has failed to deliver land, only an insignificant amount of land has so far been recovered. White farmers continue to dictate the pace of land reform and in the process they distort land markets to their advantage. The cannibalistic tendencies of markets are at play here – as George Soros once remarked, ‘markets have a notorious habit of fluctuating’. In the South African context, land markets have been fluctuating to the benefit of white farmers; Adam Smith’s invisible hand of the market has helped white farmers secure their land holdings by frustrating the South African government’s efforts to recover land and resettle landless blacks.

The logic behind all this is the obsession with foreign direct investment – for it is argued that confiscating land to resettle people will send the wrong signals to the markets. Markets get ‘emotional’ where property rights are not respected, as was demonstrated in Zimbabwe where the economy was deliberately sabotaged and boycotted after peasants occupied commercial farms.

However the language of property rights brings with it certain ambiguities; do landless blacks not have the same right to property ownership as their white counterparts? What about the recent history of forced removals, black sports clearances, and the violent murder of civilians at Sharpeville? Moreover many of these foreign capitalists that the ANC government is keen to protect directly benefited from apartheid. There is evidence to suggest that during apartheid foreign direct investment increased, with many European and American corporations investing in a country that openly violated human rights. These are the same people that are enjoying the protection of ANC elites, an insult to the suffering masses in black townships.

South Africa has a lot to learn from its northern neighbour Zimbabwe. The pitfalls of delaying land reforms were demonstrated there not long ago, when a desperate Mugabe unleashed peasants to help themselves to white farms, after markets failed to deliver land to the landless as expected. There is evidence to suggest that Mugabe has become something of a cult figure to many landless South Africans and other landless people across Africa, who see their own governments as too aligned to landed capitalists instead of righting historical injustices. Although the World Bank is now well aware of the political dangers associated with delays caused by market-driven land reform, it continues to promote these policies in South Africa, contrary to research carried out by its own economists, which has long highlighted the political risks associated with land concentration.

A few South African white farmers I've met are already nervous about the future and some have taken the bold step of selling and repatriating their profits before things get nasty. But for many rich and privileged white land owners, owning huge tracts of land is addictive – something that one can not give up even when the consequences become very expensive. Instead of co-operating with government efforts to address the land hunger facing blacks, they have instead resorted to a powerful farmer's lobby, which has frustrated efforts to recover land for resettlement.

There is no doubt that South Africa will indeed become the next frontier for 'land invasions'; the situation in the country is a ticking time bomb. It's almost impossible to think that a system of extreme injustice and poverty reflected across the country could be sustained forever. Sooner or later South Africa's poor will run out of patience and the problem is that, unlike their Zimbabwean counterparts, the South African poor will be dangerously armed. It will only take a maverick or charismatic leader to do what Mugabe did – play a political game by giving the poor the green light for an unofficial fast track land reform to take place.

However such a scenario could be easily avoided if all those involved in the land issue in South Africa work together to resolve the issue before a repeat of what happened in Zimbabwe occurs. It seems though that many of those hoarding land are keen to keep their entrenched positions. The only hope for South Africa's landless poor no longer lies with the ANC government's market driven land reform, but in the 'barbaric' process of 'land grabs' or self-provisioning.

The model can be found nowhere other than in Soweto, where self-trained 'activist electricians' are helping to reconnect those affected by power cut-offs. One wonders if this Soweto model will one day be cascaded to address the issue of landlessness. Such a process is the only way many landless people can get access to somewhere they could call home. This however requires leadership; in Zimbabwe it took Chenjerai Hunzvi the late charismatic war veterans' leader to arm-twist a reluctant Mugabe into confronting landed elites; in South Africa however such leadership is non-existent yet.

Many ANC elites of the 'Umshini wami' genre, epitomised in the person of Jacob Zuma and Julius Malema, have sunk deep into the luxury and bliss afforded to them by the

Rainbow Nation, rich kulaks with limited links to their rural constituencies. One can only hope that one day a leader will emerge among the poor to lead the battle for socio-economic justice.

AU Chief Says Madagascar Sanctions Undermined By Big Powers

(Voice of America)

14 April 2010

African Union Commission Chief Jean Ping says AU sanctions against Madagascar's leaders are being undermined by the permanent members of the UN Security Council. Sudan and Somalia were also on Mr. Ping's agenda during a news briefing at AU headquarters.

Africa's top diplomat says targeted sanctions approved by the AU Peace and Security Council against the government of Madagascar's de facto President Andry Rajoelina are working. He pointed to the army's end of April ultimatum for an acceptable way out of the 13-month political crisis as evidence the sanctions are putting pressure on the island nation's leadership.

The AU slapped a travel ban and assets freeze on Mr. Rajoelina and 108 other top officials March 17 after Madagascar's government turned its back on previously signed power sharing accords. All AU member states are bound to enforce the sanctions. But Commission Chairman Ping says the force of the penalties is undermined by a lack of support from the United Nations Security Council.

He said while African nations are mandated to enforce the sanctions, they would be more effective if endorsed by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, which comprise an international contact group on Madagascar. But he noted that African states had no means to force the big powers to act, except moral force. Other than that, he said, there's nothing we can do about it.

Mr. Ping also says he is encouraged by developments in Somalia following last month's accord between the transitional government and a moderate Sufi Islamic group. He said the alliance is beginning to turn the tide in their fight against radical al-Shabab rebels.

"The agreement reached here in Addis was important," said Jean Ping. "For the reason you know. They are controlling, and they are serious, and you see the result in the field. The impact of this is now seen by the al-Shabab. The process is long, but where have you seen this process going fast enough.

Mr. Ping also expressed general satisfaction with the way Sudan's elections have been going, considering some major parties are boycotting large parts of the poll. He said despite all the reported failings, the process seems to be going better than expected.

"Sudan, the biggest country in the continent, never organized a democratic election for almost 25 years," he said. "So what can be said is that many problems have been raised, many similar to what we observe in the continent. [But] there is not violence during elections, it is a fact, because everybody thought we would have violence. No violence. of these are relatively, if you compare to what was the fear, relatively good news."

Ping welcomed the decision to extend voting for two days, and noted that prominent international observers such as former US president Jimmy Carter had given a mostly positive assessment of election.

Mr. Carter was quoted as saying it was still too early to judge the integrity of the vote. But he told reporters in southern Sudan that despite administrative problems, he was not aware of any evidence of fraud.

Zimbabwe celebrates 30 years of independence

(BBC News)

18 April 2010

Zimbabwe is marking 30 years since independence from the UK. Celebrations include all-night song and dance performances in the capital, Harare, and a speech by President Robert Mugabe in the city's stadium.

Mr Mugabe, who has ruled since 1980, leads a unity government with rival Morgan Tsvangirai as prime minister.

On the eve of the anniversary, a civil rights group said four of its members had been denied bail after they were accused of staging an illegal protest.

The group, Women of Zimbabwe Arise (Woza) deny wrongdoing. The four were part of a group of women demonstrating against regular power cuts and high electricity tariffs in Zimbabwe.

Economic woes

Zimbabwe declared independence on 18 April 1980, following a seven-year conflict against Rhodesia's white minority rule. Mr Mugabe, a former guerrilla leader, was elected president.

Independence also brought crippling international sanctions to an end. The new country was widely seen as a new model for Africa.

Zimbabwe experienced strong growth in its first decade but the economy began to decline in the 1990s.

In 2000 Mr Mugabe launched a controversial land reform programme, seizing white-owned farms and handing them to blacks.

In the following years, farm production and the currency went into free fall. The one-time food exporter became dependent on aid.

Meanwhile Mr Mugabe suppressed the opposition, saying it was in league with former colonial power Britain.

In 2008, the opposition Movement for Democratic Change won a parliamentary majority. But MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai withdrew from the presidential run-off, citing violence against supporters.

However the two sides reached a power-sharing deal later in the year. New elections are due to be held but no date has been set.

Zimbabwe President Mugabe denies company law U-turn

(BBC News)

15 April 2010

Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe has denied that a controversial Zimbabwean law is to be shelved.

Mr Mugabe's comments contradict the Prime Minister, Morgan Tsvangirai -reflecting the rift in the uneasy coalition government.

The rules, which force companies valued at more than \$500,000 (£324,000) to be majority-owned by "indigenous" people, were issued on 1 March. This effectively ruled out ownership by white Zimbabweans or foreign firms.

Rift

President Mugabe said reports that the "indigenisation law" would be suspended were "completely false", and instead a cabinet committee was merely studying the law to improve it.

Indigenisation Minister Saviour Kasukuwere, a fellow member of the president's Zanu-PF party, also confirmed the law was going ahead.

Prime Minister Tsvangirai's office had said the rules were now "null and void" pending further consultations.

The apparent dispute highlights the continuing rift in Zimbabwe's coalition government between Mr Mugabe's Zanu-PF party and Mr Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change.

The two parties have been in coalition together since February last year, under a governing agreement that ended decades of rule by Zanu-PF and that brought to an end political violence around the 2008 presidential election.

The country's stock market has fallen by 10% since the law's introduction, with mining shares losing 20%.

Analysts said the law had served to deter much-needed foreign investment in the country. "A lot of concerns have been raised by a number of companies in the mining, manufacturing and tourism sector that the regulations would scare away potential investors," Zimbabwean journalist Brian Hungwe told the BBC.

Even so, he said the move to repeal the law came as a "huge surprise" after President Robert Mugabe had recently defended the law and said it would not be reversed. Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai has repeatedly criticised the law.

Bread basket

Under the so-called indigenisation law, companies owned by non-indigenous people were given five years to sell a 51% stake to indigenous people. They were given 45 days to submit proposals on how this would be done.

An "indigenous Zimbabwean" had been defined as "any person who before the 18 April 1980" - the official founding date of Zimbabwe - "was disadvantaged by unfair discrimination on the grounds of his or her race".

The law was seen as an extension of the government's policy of seizing white-owned farms and giving them to locals, which started more than 10 years ago.

That programme is considered by many to have failed, as many seized farms have remained dormant.

As a result, Zimbabwe - once known as the bread basket of Africa - has become a net importer of food.

Constitutional process hits snag

(Times Live)

Apr 18, 2010

The constitutional outreach teams that were to collect information before the drafting of the actual constitution failed to deploy last Tuesday as it emerged that only Sweden had released funds out of more than a dozen donors who had pledged to release funds for the process.

The United Nations Development Programme is the lead donor in raising funds for the constitutionmaking process.

The delay in releasing funds comes a week after it emerged that donors have revised downwards the \$21-million budget that was initially agreed with the government of Zimbabwe.

The donors have now pledged to provide \$18-million, while they expect the Zimbabwe government to foot the remainder.

Sources within the constitution-making team said the donors revised the budgets after indicating that they will not be paying out allowances and per diems to the teams which will be collecting information on the ground.

Parliamentary and Constitutional Affairs minister, Eric Matinenga, confirmed this week that donors have not released any funds and said the process will only begin when meaningful funds have been received from donors.

The constitution-making process is already 15 months behind schedule.

The process was thrown into controversy when parliamentarians involved in the constitution-making process were accused of abusing funds allocated by inflating their transport allowances.

It emerged that parliamentarians involved in the constitution-making process were claiming allowances of between \$300 and \$400 a day, leading to donors refusing to fund allowances.

However, Matinenga said this week that some donors were not comfortable in paying allowances.

He added that with the revised budget the Zimbabwe government will have to foot the paying of allowances.

"Some donors are not comfortable paying allowances but the word is misleading as we have as a government subsistence rates that we pay to parliamentarians and the rates are not much.

"Some donors are not comfortable with that and that is what has led to a reduction in the whole constitution budget from \$21-million to \$18-million," he said.

The crafting of a new constitution is part of the requirements of a September 2008 power-sharing deal between President Robert Mugabe, Morgan Tsvangirai and deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara that gave birth to the all-inclusive government.

Once a new constitution has been crafted by the three parties, the power-sharing government is expected to call fresh parliamentary, presidential and local government elections.

However no substantive dates have been put down for the elections.

Endless political wrangling between Zanu-PF and the two MDC formations has thrown the constitution-making process off the rails.

Zanu-PF and the MDC factions have been singing from different hymn sheets, with Zanu-PF arguing that a draft the three parties made before the 2008 harmonised elections should be used as a starting point in putting together the new constitution.

However, the other parties in the agreement have remained adamant that only a people-driven process is acceptable in coming up with a new constitution.

Little joy for 30-year-old Zimbabwe

(Times Live)

17 April 2010

The majority of citizens are struggling because of economic and political crises. A few years after gaining independence in 1980 from the white-minority Rhodesian regime, Zimbabwe was a regional model of political and economic stability with a currency at par with the US dollar, well-equipped schools and health facilities.

"In 1980 Zimbabwe was a country full of hope," said Deon Theron, president of the Commercial Farmers' Union (CFU), most of whose members were thrown off their properties under President Robert Mugabe's controversial land reforms.

"Now we can't even feed ourself. How are we independent if we have to rely on other countries to feed us and yet we are one of the leading exporters of maize?"

The land reforms, which saw the seizure of around 3,000 properties from white farmers, are blamed for a slump in food production that has resulted in at least two million people

requiring food aid in a country that used to export its surplus grain. Maria Mache, 25, considers herself lucky to have a formal job in a country where at least 85 percent of the population is unemployed.

For Mache and her contemporaries, independence has little meaning. "Young people have nothing to do," said Mache, who works for the pro-democracy alliance Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition.

"They just sit around and do nothing, which makes them vulnerable to political manipulation," she added.

"Although politically aware, Zimbabwe youth don't know the nitty-gritty of politics. They are just recruited to attack political opponents. They are only being trained in youth camps and taught how to kill and maim."

Mache's interests include watching television, listening to music and clubbing. But as a young woman she feels some laws at times infringe on her rights.

"(For example) I will be arrested for loitering and called a prostitute if I come out of the club at night," she said, complaining about a law under which unaccompanied women are rounded up at night and accused of soliciting men.

"We are still determined to contribute towards a better Zimbabwe although not happy we are being excluded from politics. Instead young people are used as political stooges and pawns."

Deon Theron shuttles between the capital and his mother's farm in Beatrice 70 kilometres (45 miles) southwest of the capital, Harare, after being forced off three farms under the land reform programme.

"I bought my first farm in 1984 under president Robert Mugabe," said Theron, who owns 400 cattle and 200 sheep.

"I borrowed money from the bank and I struggled to pay the money back but I worked hard," he said.

"Everything on the farm I owned, I bought it -- I never inherited anything."

As Theron walked around the farm with his foreman Edson Mirros, he said that in 1980 no one could have foreseen the current status of the country.

"There were no warning signs. I remember when Mugabe came into power he preached reconciliation and non-racialism -- a contrast to the present, where whites are used as a political tool," Theron said.

Mirros, 43, said he faced an uncertain future with his seven children. "I have benefitted nothing from this government except hardships and poverty," he said.

"I don't understand why the government chased away the white farmers but they came and ask them for donation for independence day celebrations."

However, war veteran Endy Mhlanga feels a lot has been achieved in the past 30 years.

"This independence came out of the armed struggle where people perished inside and outside of Zimbabwe," said Mhlanga, who runs a training college in downtown Harare and owns a garage and farm.

"What we fought for is land, so after independence our president, Comrade Robert Mugabe, has made it possible the land we fought for was redistributed to the indigenous people.

"There was nothing wrong with our economy and our president, it's people from outside who intervened and crippled our economy."

War veterans and those who joined them in grabbing farms received divine visits from ancestral spirits, he said.

"That spirit can't be ignored by any person. Don't blame Mugabe for nothing, he did nothing wrong. He did not harass white farmers, but harassment came to those who were resisting."

Mbeki joins hostage talks

(Times Live)

Apr 18, 2010

SA police spokesman Major-General Nonkululeko Mbatha said Mbeki, chairman of the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel for Sudan, had been approached to help facilitate the release of the four.

The Sunday Times was able to track down the family of one of the peacekeepers, Michael Annett, a former top Cape Town narcotics policeman.

The 51-year-old was based at Cape Town central police station until he joined the United Nations/African Union peacekeeping force, Unamid, seven months ago.

His son, David, 24, said: "He called my mother, Susan, every day that he was away, and he would regularly send her SMSes when he was travelling.

"She spoke to him last Saturday, and they got cut off. He never mentioned that something sinister was going on."

Annett and his colleagues were kidnapped last Sunday.

"My mother is beside herself with worry, and although he might be released soon, she says she will only be at peace when he walks through the door. She hasn't gone to work and barely eats or sleeps," said David.

He said his family was informed on Tuesday of the kidnapping.

Mbatha said an inter-departmental South African team was assisting the UN, the main negotiators.

A new rebel group, the Movement for the Struggle for the People of Darfur (MSDP), led by Mohamed Abdallah Sharar, has claimed responsibility for the kidnapping and demanded \$700000.

Military personnel in Sudan told the Sunday Times that the rebels appeared to be continually moving the four South Africans around southern Sudan.

A senior official based in Sudan said the rebels were in regular touch with the UN and South African authorities.

South Africa's acting ambassador in Sudan, Rashida Adam, said that, based on telephone discussions with the rebels, the South Africans appeared to be in good health.

David Annett said his father had been in the police force "for most of his life" and was passionate about his job.

"Last year, he was given an award for being a top narcotics cop, and he is highly qualified."

South Africa played a significant role in the recent historic Sudanese elections, held over five days last week for the first time in 24 years.

Brigalia Bam, chairman of South Africa's Independent Electoral Commission, is in Sudan, where she has been assisting the local electoral body. South Africa also assisted with the printing of ballot papers.

Vote counting started on Friday amid allegations of ballot-rigging by both supporters of President Omar al-Bashir in the north and ex-rebels in the south.

Mugabe admits demise of education system

(Times Live)

Apr 17, 2010

"To the teachers, it is with regret and apologies that your reward has been nothing but a mere pittance, not worthy to be called salaries at all but just allowances," The Herald newspaper quoted Mugabe as saying.

"Quite a number of children have dropped out of school and it pains us because we had developed our system to a level that it was admired by many in Africa, if not the world," he added.

Mugabe was addressing teachers and pupils at the annual children's party he hosts before the country celebrates independence day.

Sunday marks 30 years since Zimbabwe gained independence from Britain, an occasion that has sparked extensive commentary about the country's deterioration during Mugabe's three-decade-long rule.

Zimbabwe was hailed as a model for Africa at independence in 1980, but is struggling to escape a spectacular economic collapse that has ground the country to a virtual halt.

The country's public education system, once considered the best on the continent, has crumbled over the last decade, with up to 15 pupils sharing a textbook.

Government school teachers in Zimbabwe earn 165 dollars (122 euros) a month. Around 20,000 teachers have left in search of better pay.

"Our standards have fallen," Mugabe said. "But, of course, there is always room for improvement and the hopes that things will get better.

"Let's keep the spirit that shows there is always optimism on the part of parents, children and government that we are moving ahead, that there is progress not regression," he said.

Madagascar army gives president end-April deadline

(Alert Net)

12 Apr 2010

ANTANANARIVO, April 12 (Reuters) - Madagascar's army has given President Andry Rajoelina until the end of April to offer an acceptable way out of the 13-month political crisis on the Indian Ocean island, a military source said on Monday.

"The army bosses asked Rajoelina to present a road map in 48 hours, and after discussions everyone agreed on waiting until the end of the month," said a senior military source present at a meeting between Rajoelina and the military leadership.

A source close to the presidency confirmed the timetable. No details were given of what the army would do if Rajoelina failed to meet the deadline.

Political analysts say there has been growing unease in some quarters of the government and military at Rajoelina's handling of the crisis, which has unnerved major foreign investors exploiting the island's oil and mineral resources.

"We have asked the government, the High Transitional Authority, to publish a clear road map," army chief General Andre Ndriarijoana told reporters at an earlier news conference.

Ndriarijoana, who backed Rajoelina's ouster of former President Marc Ravalomanana in March last year, also demanded proof of how Rajoelina's administration would pay public sector salaries and finance legislative and presidential elections due later this year.

"We call on the politicians to end all street action and to take part in the building of a nation for all within a timeframe that we have given to the government," Ndriarijoana said.

Last month the African Union imposed targeted sanctions on Rajoelina and more than 100 of his key backers. The European Union is also mulling sanctions.

Rumours have swirled around Madagascar's capital in recent weeks of a planned coup to unseat Rajoelina.

The former disc jockey toppled former President Marc Ravalomanana with the help of renegade troops, among them Ndriarijoana, last March after weeks of violent street protests against Ravalomanana's increasingly authoritarian leadership.

A statement released by the presidency said it was paramount the armed forces were unified and underlined the need for the military "not to be manipulated for political means".

Late last week, Rajoelina's prime minister sacked Armed Forces Minister General Noel Rakotonandrasana in a show of no confidence. But Rakotonandrasana has refused to leave his post. [ID:nnLDE63718R]

The army demanded Rajoelina offer a solution that would be acceptable to foreign donors who have suspended aid worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

"Above all, it is demanded the government work with all actors ... a necessary condition for a free and transparent election, accepted by the Malagasy people and the international community," said Ndriarijoana.

Madagascar leader to disband govt, form new one

(Alert Net)

15 Apr 2010

ANTANANARIVO, April 15 (Reuters) - Madagascar's leader has vowed to disband his internationally rejected government and form an interim body with an ousted opposition leader following an ultimatum from the army to solve a festering crisis.

Analysts say there has been growing unease in some quarters of the government and military, and increased international pressure on Andry Rajoelina to solve the crisis, which has unnerved investors in the island's oil and mineral resources.

Rajoelina said that he was willing to meet with former President Marc Ravalomanana -- whom the former disc jockey ousted from power with the army's help -- but any deal would not be based on a previous pact brokered in Ethiopia and Mozambique.

"We are going to organise (elections) within three months, or three and a half months at the latest. There is no question of coming back to the Maputo and Addis Ababa accords, but to find out what can be the minimum acceptable to everyone," Rajoelina said on state television late on Wednesday.

"The current government will be dissolved and a new one will be formed ... The Government of National Union will be put in place after a meeting (between Rajoelina and Ravalomanana) which is expected to take place in South Africa."

Rajoelina has repeatedly set election deadlines and missed. The crisis -- which began last March after weeks of violent protests, triggering a year of leadership squabbles on the world's fourth largest island -- has paralysed economic growth, slashed public spending and pushed up urban unemployment.

A power-sharing deal between Rajoelina, Ravalomanana and two other former presidents were signed last year, but persistent wrangling over who should get the top posts meant the accord was never implemented.

"This meeting (between Rajoelina and Ravalomanana) is the last chance," Rajoelina said. But exiled former leader Ravalomanana told his supporters from South Africa that the only way forward was to implement the deals reached in Addis Ababa and Maputo.

"Do not think of any meeting if it is not about implementing the Maputo and Addis Ababa accords. These are criticised even though they have not been put in place."

Army chief General Andre Ndriarijoana -- who backed Rajoelina in taking power last year -- and other army bosses have given Rajoelina until the end of April to offer an acceptable way out of the political crisis. [ID:nLDE63B27D]

The army did not say what action it would take if Rajoelina failed, but a military takeover cannot be ruled out.

But military arm-twisting will only succeed if the opposition leaders, including Ravalomanana, play their part.

UNHCR protests to Zambia about deportation of 36 Congolese refugees

(Alert Net)

13 Apr 2010

GENEVA, April 13 (UNHCR) – The UN refugee agency on Tuesday protested to the Zambian government over the recent expulsions of 36 refugees to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. UNHCR spokesperson, Melissa Fleming, told journalists in Geneva that the agency had "expressed alarm at the developments" in a note verbale sent to the Zambian authorities.

All of the Congolese refugees had been living in the Meheba settlement in the country's north-west. The refugees, who were returned at the Kasumbalesa border point, were given no explanation for their deportation or the possibility of challenging the decision under Zambian law.

The first six people returned were sent back in February and included a pregnant woman. The latest group, comprising 30 people, was sent back over the weekend of April 3-4 – leaving spouses and children at Meheba.

The deportations follow a security and police operation in Meheba in late February, which brought an end to a protracted demonstration by refugees. During the operation, a refugee woman was shot and killed, several others were injured and some 150 people were arrested.

"UNHCR fully shares the government of the Republic of Zambia's interest in ensuring security and order in the refugee camps and settlements. Refugees and asylum-seekers, moreover, are bound to conform to the laws and regulations of the Republic of Zambia," Fleming said. "The consequence of their failure to do so, however, should be prosecution under national laws and not forcible expulsion to their country of origin," she added.

Zambia has for more than 30 years provided asylum to tens of thousands of refugees who have found sanctuary on its territory after fleeing war and civil strife. The 15,000 people at the Meheba settlement come from Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Somalia and Uganda. In total, Zambia hosts some 57,000 refugees.

Fleming said UNHCR urged the Zambian government to cease the expulsion of refugees and asylum-seekers to the DRC and to uphold its refugee protection responsibilities under international law.

UN agency urges Zambia to halt deportation of refugees

(UN News Service)

13 April 2010

13 April 2010 – The United Nations refugee agency today urged the Zambian Government to halt the expulsion of refugees and asylum-seekers to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) after 36 individuals were recently sent back.

According to Melissa Fleming, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the affected individuals are from the Meheba refugee settlement in Zambia's northwest.

Six people were sent back in February, including a pregnant woman, and another group of 30 were sent back earlier this month.

“The refugees,” said Ms. Fleming, “were given no explanation regarding the reasons for their deportation or the possibility of challenging the decision under Zambian law.”

They were deported following a security and police operation in Meheba on 24 February, which brought an end to a protracted demonstration by refugees, she noted. During the operation, a refugee woman was shot and killed, several others were injured and some 150 persons were arrested.

The 15,000 people at the Meheba settlement come from Angola, Burundi, DRC, Rwanda, Somalia and Uganda, and are among the 57,000 refugees currently hosted by Zambia, which has provided asylum for over 30 years to those fleeing war and civil strife in their homelands.

Ms. Fleming said UNHCR fully shares the Zambian Government’s interest in ensuring security and order in the refugee camps and settlements, and that refugees and asylum-seekers are bound to conform to the laws and regulations of the country.

“The consequence of their failure to do so, however, should be prosecution under national laws and not forcible expulsion to their country of origin,” she stressed, adding that a note verbale was sent to the Zambian authorities today expressing alarm at the recent developments.

Economic Developments

Angola receives UN aid to help foster investment

(UN News Service)

14 April 2010

14 April 2010 – The United Nations, which sent four separate missions to Angola during its devastating decades-long civil war in efforts to help end the conflict, is seeking to strengthen the capacities of the now peaceful southern African country in the field of investment.

The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) today issued a study outlining the legal framework for private investment in Angola in an effort to systematize information on the investment situation.

“To promote investment in Angola and successfully conclude international investment agreements, the Government must reinforce the legal framework for investment, and the report aims to contribute to a better understanding of the Angolan framework and its historic development,” said the agency, which was established in 1964 to foster the development-friendly integration of poorer countries into the world economy.

The study gives an overview of Angolan laws and decrees regulating private investment, in particular foreign direct investment. Angola's involvement in international conventions and regional agreements on investment is also analysed and an overview of the international agreements on foreign investment signed by Angola is included.

The study was prepared by the UNCTAD TrainForTrade programme and the Division on Investment and Enterprise. The TrainForTrade programme for Angola aims at assisting the Government in implementing locally owned national training and capacity-building activities in international trade and investment. The project is funded by the European Commission.

Launched in 1998, TrainForTrade programmes seek to strengthen national and regional human and institutional resources for trade and investment as a key to growth for UNCTAD member countries, particularly the least developed ones (LDCs). The programme works with UNCTAD's research and analytical departments to design, update, and adapt learning materials and deliver training courses.

During Angola's civil war between the Government, backed by Cuban troops, and rebels led by Jonas Savimbi and supported by South African forces, the UN sent three separate verification missions, beginning in 1989, to help implement various efforts to end the conflict.

The first two successfully monitored the withdrawal of Cuban troops and oversaw a multilateral ceasefire. The third, sent after renewed fighting and mandated to deploy 7,000 troops, sought to help the parties restore peace and achieve national reconciliation, but was faced with continued conflict.

The fourth and final peacekeeping mission, the UN Observer Mission in Angola (MONUA), was withdrawn in 1999 following the collapse of the peace process and the shooting down of two UN aircraft.

Zimbabwe's new farmers defend their gains

(BBC News)

13 April 2010

Under President Robert Mugabe's land reform programme, some 4,000 white farmers have been driven away and their land given to black farmers. The BBC's Dan Isaacs talks to Zimbabwe's new farming class.

Endy Mhlanga, a war veteran of Zimbabwe's war of independence, sits with me in the garage of his recently acquired farmhouse. A pot of maize meal bubbles on an open fire beside us.

It is getting dark, but there is no electricity. Power cuts - often lasting days - are a regular feature of life here. And the mosquitoes are descending.

"As war veterans we are satisfied that the programme of land reform has succeeded," Mr Mhlanga tells me. "It might not be 100%, but now the land is with the people of Zimbabwe."

Mr Mhlanga's farm is on prime agricultural land, but now most of it is lying fallow. What was once a large commercial farm now produces nothing for export, and where once there were intensively irrigated fields of wheat and tobacco, rough grassland now stretches into the distance.

One small field of maize is growing near the farmhouse, a few turkeys cluck their way around an old tennis court, and a dozen or so cattle graze at the bottom of the garden.

"We have the ability to work on the land," explains Mr Mhlanga, "but we're prevented from doing so because of a lack of funding.

"Investors aren't forthcoming, so we aren't able to do much with the land. For us, this is really a silent war." A decade ago, there were more than 4,000 white-owned farms in Zimbabwe.

But years of President Mugabe's land reform programmes have forced these farmers out, markedly changing the Zimbabwean farming scene and jarring the agriculture-based economy.

Today, there are just a few dozen left, and many of those have now been served with eviction orders.

As a former secretary-general of the country's pro-Mugabe war veterans association, Mr Mhlanga was actively involved in those evictions, and now recalls the violent tactics used to force the white farmers to leave.

"I don't have any regrets," he tells me. "Had they agreed to share nicely, none of these troubles would have happened."

The collapse in agricultural output across the country has had catastrophic consequences for Zimbabwe's economy.

Some four million people have fled the country over the past decade, and although economic conditions have improved recently, the overwhelming majority of those who stayed no longer have formal employment.

Rose garden

Johannes Vengesai lost his job when the farm he was working on was occupied by the "war veterans".

He was thrown out of his home as well, and he now lives with his family in a disused tobacco silo.

It is a squatters' life - he has been threatened with eviction from here too but says he has got nowhere else to go.

"What bleeds my heart," says Joseph, a farmer who was evicted from an adjacent citrus farm, "is that if we leave the land lying idle like this, we're not growing any future for ourselves."

As we look out over thousands of untended citrus trees he explains that all they produce now are shrivelled, bitter lemons.

"As a country we are losing millions of dollars, and as ordinary Zimbabweans we can no longer afford to send our children to school."

But it is a very different country for those who have directly benefited from the land reform.

At the farmhouse now owned by Stan and Jane Kasukuwere, lunch has been set out in the garden under a spreading jacaranda tree.

The well-tended lawn sweeps down to a rose garden and swimming pool. Beyond the fence, their land stretches as far as the eye can see.

Mr and Mrs Kasukuwere are supporters of President Mugabe's Zanu-PF party, and they have been allocated this previously white-owned farm on rich agricultural land. It is not long before the lunch talk turns to politics.

"This is my country, the land is my birthright," Mrs Kasukuwere tells me. "I feel sorry for the previous white owners of this farm, but I don't feel guilty. It's a tough world."

"What Mugabe has done is break the ice," says Mr Kasukuwere. "He's the first African leader to stand up publicly and criticise our former colonial masters. Mugabe is one hell of an African leader."

'Revolution'

A minority of well-connected Zimbabweans have benefited from the reforms, but the overwhelming majority are far poorer than they were a decade ago.

And because of the violent and politicised way it has been carried out, support for President Mugabe has fallen sharply.

But to challenge the reform process is to be seen as both a colonial puppet and against black empowerment.

So, despite his lack of popularity, Mr Mugabe's political opponents have so far found it impossible to defeat him.

This is why for the time being - and after long and slow deliberation - they have entered into an alliance with Mr Mugabe's Zanu-PF party.

It is this unity government that has brought about a degree of economic stability, and a reduction in political violence.

But the farm invasions have continued to this day, and no political group within this fragile coalition has called for them to be stopped, let alone reversed.

Back in Harare, it was not hard to track down the owner of one of the abandoned citrus plantations I had visited.

"You've got to understand, that we've been through a revolution," explains Bright Matonga, a former government minister, and currently a Zanu-PF member of parliament. "Things have calmed down now, and soon production will pick up."

When I asked him about his forlorn citrus tree plantations and the destitute workers living nearby, he blamed a lack of credit available from banks and the "sanctions" being imposed on Zimbabwe.

"I think, rather than to criticise the land reform process," he argued, "you have to understand that it had to take place and that it is now irreversible."

ZIMBABWE: EU and U.S. Exhibitors Stay Far Away from Trade Fair

(IPS)

14 April 2010

BULAWAYO, Zimbabwe, Apr 14 (IPS) - Companies from the European Union and the U.S. will not feature at this year's Zimbabwe International Trade Fair despite the formation of a government of national unity last year.

The formation of the government of national unity in Feb 2009 between President Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF, long-time rival and current Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC and the Arthur Mutambara MDC faction was seen as holding the opportunity of thawing the decade-old trade and investment stand-off between Zimbabwe and its erstwhile major trading partners.

But the EU and U.S. remain wary of the shaky coalition as Mugabe refuses to make crucial concessions and implement sections of the so-called global political agreement that led to the formation of the government.

Early this year, the EU extended sanctions against Mugabe that restrict him, members of ZANU-PF and their companies from having dealings with the EU.

"In view of the situation in Zimbabwe, in particular the lack of progress in the implementation of the global political agreement signed in September 2008, the restrictive measures ... should be extended for a further period of 12 months," the EU said.

Established more than 60 years ago, the trade fair has historically been the country's investment barometer. Last year the exhibition was on the verge of cancellation after potential and traditional exhibitors showed little enthusiasm to participate.

Companies from countries like Germany last featured at the trade fair in 2001 before relations between Zimbabwe and the West soured in the wake of Mugabe's anti-democratic clampdown. Investors have fled Zimbabwe, citing years of hostile economic policies under one of Africa's longest serving leaders.

While officials from the U.S. embassy in Harare told IPS they did not have any information on the participation of U.S. companies at this year's fair, there will be no U.S. companies exhibiting, according to March figures released by the trade fair's general manager Daniel Chigaru.

By the end of March, about 95 percent exhibition space had been taken up, Chigaru told local media. Chigaru said there was an increase in foreign exhibitors this year, compared to last year. Among the 14 countries represented at the fair, India, Iran and Indonesia had confirmed their participation.

Timothy Gerhadson, the U.S. embassy's public affairs officer in Harare, told IPS "there are no trade restrictions between the Zimbabwe and the U.S." and noted that "bilateral trade has increased significantly in recent years". He did not elaborate on the volume of trade.

"We expect more U.S. companies will consider Zimbabwe as a business destination if the government succeeds in reducing risks that tend to impede trade and investment," Gerhadson pointed out.

Analysts say the absence of exhibitors from the EU and the U.S. could mean Zimbabwe has a long way to go toward attracting tangible investment if the country is to regain its position as one of Africa's strongest economies.

ZANU-PF is pushing legislation that will nationalise foreign investments. Economists warn that this is against the spirit of economic recovery envisaged by the formation of the government of national unity and will only serve to fuel investor flight.

The British based Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) has reported that these nationalisation plans – which have been opposed by Tsvangirai – are convincing foreign

investors to stay away. The EIU is a research and advisory firm that provides country, industry and management analysis.

The effect of these plans has been felt in the preparations for the trade fair, believes Bulawayo-based economist Titus Njini.

As long as there is no consensus within the coalition government on the way to return the economy to mid-1990s levels, the trade fair will just be one of those shows held to save face, Njini told IPS.

"However, I believe the trade fair could still be relevant in the future for investors to know whether they can put their money here," he added.

This year's trade fair, with the theme "Unlocking Our Investment Potential", kicks off on Apr 20 and runs to Apr 24.

Angola: Oil Wealth Eludes Nation's Poor

(Human Rights Watch)

13 April 2010

(Washington, DC) - The government of Angola has not done enough to combat pervasive corruption and mismanagement, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today. Even though the oil-rich country's gross domestic product has increased by more than 400 percent in the last six years, Angolans are not seeing their lives improve accordingly, Human Rights Watch said.

The 31-page report, "Transparency and Accountability in Angola: An Update," documents how the government took only limited steps to improve transparency after Human Rights Watch disclosed in a 2004 report that billions of dollars in oil revenue illegally bypassed the central bank and disappeared without explanation. The report details newly disclosed evidence of corruption and mismanagement and includes recommendations for reversing the pattern.

"The government needs to take strong action to combat the corruption and secrecy that undermine Angolans' rights," said Arvind Ganesan, director of the Business and Human Rights Program at Human Rights Watch. "Here is a nation with a wealth of resources while its people live in poverty."

Human Rights Watch said that a recent agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), enacted in the wake of the global financial crisis and drop in the price of oil, offers some hope for improvement if its provisions are carried out.

The government has improved the publication of oil revenue figures, the Human Rights Watch report says, but human indicators in Angola remain abysmal and have not been commensurate with the rapid growth in Angola's national wealth. Angola is the largest

producer of oil in sub-Saharan Africa, yet millions of Angolans have limited access to basic social services. Angola ranked 143rd out of 182 countries in the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index.

Angola's ranking in Transparency International's 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index is growing worse, from 158th out of 180 countries in 2008 down to 162nd in 2009.

The report also details new evidence of corruption and mismanagement, including that of Dr. Aguinaldo Jaime, who served as the governor of the Angolan Central Bank from 1999 to 2002. As documented by a February 2010 US Senate report, Jaime initiated a series of suspicious \$50 million transactions with US banks. For each attempt, the banks, concerned about the likelihood of fraud, ultimately rejected the transfer or returned the money shortly after receiving it. During Jaime's three-year tenure as central bank governor, the government could not account for approximately \$2.4 billion.

Recent statements by President Jose Eduardo dos Santos seem to indicate a willingness to combat government corruption. He has called for a "zero tolerance" policy against corruption. And as the US Senate conducted its recent investigation into corruption in Angola and elsewhere, he announced a new Law on Administrative Probity, to reduce corruption by government officials.

However, given that the president and ruling party have been in power for more than three decades, including the entire period in which oil-fueled corruption has been rampant, skeptics will wait to see whether meaningful action will accompany these statements, Human Rights Watch said. Further, a new constitution was recently enacted that will enable dos Santos, in power now for 30 years, to remain in power for 13 more years.

"Dr. Jaime's activities underscore the need for accountability," Ganesan said. "If the Angolan government is serious about transparency and reform, it should rigorously investigate government officials, publish audits of its expenditures, and act on President dos Santos' pledge of 'zero tolerance' for corruption."

While the recently announced reforms have not gone far enough, a new Stand-By Arrangement with the IMF offers both the framework and international impetus to make substantive improvements and combat corruption in Angola.

This may be an opportunity for the Chinese government to address problems with transparency and accountability, Human Rights Watch said. The Chinese government and Chinese companies are some of the largest investors, trading partners, and consumers of Angola's oil. The Chinese government and Chinese companies have invested billions in oil-for-infrastructure deals while remaining relatively silent on governance in Angola and elsewhere.

The China Investment Fund, a prominent private Chinese company that has extensive ties to Sonangol, the Angolan national oil company, is of particular concern. It has been controversial in Angola and other countries, such as Guinea.

Human Rights Watch said that IMF board members, such as the United States and China, should ensure that Angola complies with provisions of the Stand-By Arrangement, specifically by making public the audits of the state oil company Sonangol and providing regular updates detailing Angola's expenditures.

In addition to the role of the United States as an IMF board member, the Obama Administration has been outspoken about corruption, but some of its policy proscriptions are unlikely to have a significant impact. Instead, Human Rights Watch urged the administration to fully implement the recommendations from the US Senate to combat the use of US financial institutions by foreign kleptocrats to spend their money in the United States.

Pirates seize cargo ship off Seychelles

(Alert Net)

11 Apr 2010

NAIROBI, April 11 (Reuters) - Pirates seized a Saint Vincent and the Grenadines flagged merchant ship off the coast of the Seychelles on Sunday, the EU naval force said.

A regional maritime body warned other vessels to avoid the area for the next two days as the weather was suitable for more hijackings.

"The ... cargo ship MV Rak Afrikana has been hijacked this morning ... approximately 280 nautical miles west of Seychelles," EUNAVFOR said in a statement.

"The Rak Afrikana has currently stopped due to engine problems." Andrew Mwangura, head of the East African Seafarers' Assistance Programme, said the ship had a crew of 23 Chinese.

EUNAVFOR said Seychelles' Rak Afrikana Shipping Ltd owned the 7,561-dwt ship. Gangs have seized dozens of ships in the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden over the last few years. Despite international naval patrols, pirate activity is predicted to rise in coming months as the weather improves.

Mwangura said ships should avoid the seas around where the Rak Afrikana was taken for the next two days.

"This area will remain high risk for the next 24-48 hours as weather conditions continue to be conducive to small boat operations," he said in a statement.

Somali pirates have made millions of dollars in ransoms by hijacking ships off their anarchic country's coast and have extended their range using mother ships, sometimes seized vessels, from which to launch attacks with smaller craft.

Zimbabwe Suspends Company Take Overs by Blacks

(Voice of America)

14 April 2010

Zimbabwe's Cabinet has postponed the regulations for domestic and foreign companies to submit plans to hand 51 percent of shares to black Zimbabweans. The decision is a triumph for Movement for Democratic Change legislators.

MDC trade, finance and investment ministers in President Robert Mugabe's cabinet successfully suspended regulations to give black Zimbabweans control over all the country's private and publicly-owned companies.

The cabinet decided to extend the April 16 deadline for companies valued at more than \$500,000 to submit plans of how they would give majority shares to black Zimbabweans. No new date was put forward in the cabinet.

After the indigenization regulations were published two months ago, shares on the Zimbabwe Stock Exchange crashed and potential investors fled, according to many in Zimbabwe's business community.

Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's spokesman, James Maridadi, confirmed the regulations have been suspended. Other political sources say the regulation will be substantially revised after consultations with business, legal and parliamentary committees.

Legal expert Derek Matyszak, the author of a recent detailed critique of the regulations, said a board to enforce them was appointed shortly after Swiss-based Nestle refused to accept milk last October from a dairy occupied and run by Mr. Mugabe's wife, Grace.

Nestle, said it was illegal for it to buy Mrs. Mugabe's milk because she is on the list of Zimbabweans with whom EU citizens may not trade, and the Swiss government has the same laws.

The indigenization laws would also make it illegal for any white person to control companies that process milk.

Matyszak said the laws had been drafted carelessly. "I would have been very surprised if the regulations had got past the parliamentary legal committee because they were unimplementable in the form in which they were in," he said. "They were unimplementable from a technical point of view, from a legal point of view and from a constitutional standpoint."

Matyszak said the good news about the suspension of the indigenization of Zimbabwe's companies is in contrast to widespread disappointment among civil rights activists over the recent establishment of a new Zimbabwe Electoral Commission.

He said the electoral commission would effectively be controlled by its vice chairman, who was on the previous commission that ignored violence during the presidential elections of 2008.

"MDC had the power to ensure that a very robust Zimbabwe Electoral Commission was put into place," said Matyszak. "They have squandered that opportunity. The chairperson of the commission is a Namibian judge who is based in Namibia, so quite clearly he will not be able to be very hands on and it is likely he will only come into the country during election periods."

Matyszak said the Movement for Democratic Change has failed to use its parliamentary majority to ensure commissions in the unity government are effectively controlled by trusted democrats.

Social Developments

African nations meet to boost disaster risk reduction at UN-backed forum

(UN News Service)

14 April 2010

14 April 2010 – Delegates from 42 countries in Africa, which along with Asia is the most vulnerable continent to disasters, kicked off a United Nations-backed meeting in Nairobi today to discuss ways to make their communities and citizens safer.

Over 700,000 people in Africa have been killed, and more than 300 million others affected, over the past 30 years by more than 1,800 disasters, according to the Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED).

The second Africa Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction brings together more than 170 delegates representing government, regional economic communities, donors, academia, UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to discuss an issue that is vital to the continent's future.

"As the 2009 Global Assessment Report on disaster risk reduction indicates, people's exposure to disasters is growing at a faster rate than risk reducing capacities are being strengthened," says Margareta Wahlström, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Participants at the three-day meeting will discuss and adopt an updated version of the Programme of Action for the Implementation of the Africa Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction and concrete measures for the period 2006-2015, as well as specific areas of interventions, expected results and measurable indicators to monitor progress.

They are expected to define mechanisms and identify resources to help implement the African Strategy and Programme of Action, prioritizing investments that will contribute to making schools, hospitals and cities safer against disasters.

Ms. Wahlström noted that regional mechanisms such as the African Strategy and the Programme of Action are the best tools to address new challenges and avoid disasters on the continent, which is likely to be more affected by climate-related hazards in the future.

The event, organized by the African Union Commission, the Government of Kenya and the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), in collaboration with the World Bank, takes place in parallel with the First Ministerial Conference of Ministers Responsible for Meteorology in Africa, organized from 12 to 16 April by the UN World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the Kenyan Government and the AU Commission.

NAMIBIA: Banking Water for the Future

(IPS)

16 April 2010

WINDHOEK, Apr 16 (IPS) - In the driest capital city south of the Sahara, water engineers are "banking" ground water to meet future demand, but the enormous costs might sink the project before water can be harvested.

Albertina Hameva lives in a "kambaschu", a corrugated iron dwelling in an informal settlement on the outskirts of Windhoek. There is no power, no water and no sanitation. Asked where she goes to the toilet, she points to the little veld meandering through the hundreds of shacks that perch uneasily on the slopes of a dry riverbed: "Here. All of us just go right here."

The riverbed is in the catchment area of what ought to be Windhoek's largest fresh water reserve, the four million cubic metre Goreangab Dam, which is rendered useless by human waste that is flushed into it.

This is why 70 percent of Windhoek's water is pumped from dams as far as 160 kilometres away through old and worn out pipelines. Another 25 percent) of the city's daily water needs of between 58,000 and 70,000 cubic metres comes from a sewage reclamation plant that's running at full capacity. A mere five percent of the drinking water is extracted from the aquifer below the city.

The aquifer should be the city's lifeline in times of drought, but it's almost empty because of over-extraction since the 1950s. "If the pipeline bursts there might be a water shortage for the entire city," says Windhoek's chief water engineer Ferdinand Brinkman.

That informal settlements such as Hameva's grow by 10 percent a year only increases the pressure on the water supply.

With low rainfall and high evaporation rates, water is always in short supply and this is reflected in its price and availability. Poor communities get water from communal taps – paying roughly 14 U.S. cents for 25 litres – that are often far away and shared with hundreds of people. Industries are allocated a carefully-monitored quota, and pay a punitive tariff if they use more.

"Building and unsustainable use caused a cone of depression or a 'hole' in the aquifer. If this is recharged the city would recoup 47 million cubic metres of water, or even 66 million if we use so called 'deep-drill' boreholes," says the Deputy Director of Geo-Hydrology in the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry, Greg Christelis.

"This would provide Windhoek with an emergency water supply if pipelines burst or if there is a drought and we cannot pump enough water from the dams," adds Brinkman.

But "banking" the water will be a costly affair. Recharging the depleted aquifer will take fourteen years, during which the city will minimise its outtake.

However even with recharge complete, groundwater cannot replace other water sources, warns Brinkman. "Only one percent of rainfall trickles down to the aquifer, or some 1.73 million cubic litres per year. That should be our sustainable yield.

"Only in times of emergency – such as prolonged drought - can we go up to five million cubic metres, but it's really a strategic reserve that we are trying to build up here."

Windhoek's aquifer is an underground reservoir fed by fractures in quartzite, the hard rock the city rests on; this means any pollution can spread quickly, says Christelis.

"If the aquifer is polluted it needs many years to get clean, it could even be totally destroyed. Lusaka, for instance, has large reserves of fresh water under the city, but it's heavily polluted."

To prevent pollution, only treated water from the general supply mix is pumped into the aquifer, where water can move as much as 900 metres a day.

As a further measure, a special water conservation zone has been established. A yellow line appears on urban planning maps, south of which no development is allowed in order to not jeopardise the recharge of the aquifer.

"This means that 10,000 plots cannot be sold, constituting a 2-3 billion rand (210-410 million dollars) loss for the city," says Brinkman. "Or an investment in clean water, depending on how you look at it."

Another big cost is the drilling of specialised boreholes through which to pump water in and out of the aquifer, precisely situated along geological fault lines that act as conduits to the underground resource.

The total cost of this and an overhaul of the main pipeline from the supply dams is estimated to be 62.5 million dollars, with the state picking up only part of the tab.

"The cost of the recharge of the aquifer for the city will be between R200 and R300 million (\$27-40 million)," says Brinkman. "Our annual budget is only R240 million (\$32.5 million) and just a fraction is allocated to such infrastructure investment."

Recovering the cost from consumers would require doubling the price of water: an unattractive proposition given that Windhoek's water users already pay more than their counterparts in neighbouring South Africa, while generally earning far less.

"There is not really such a thing as independent water producers that we can partner up with, so instead we are looking into international loans, but the interest and redemption conditions on these can be very steep."

The city hopes to negotiate financing that will allow servicing and repayment of a loan to be spread over a long enough period that it does not stifle service delivery and the economic life of industries around the city.

Ten things we have learnt about Africa

(BBC News)

15 April 2010

The Pew Research Center has just released one of the biggest ever studies on attitudes to religion and morality in Africa, which has revealed a host of interesting facts.

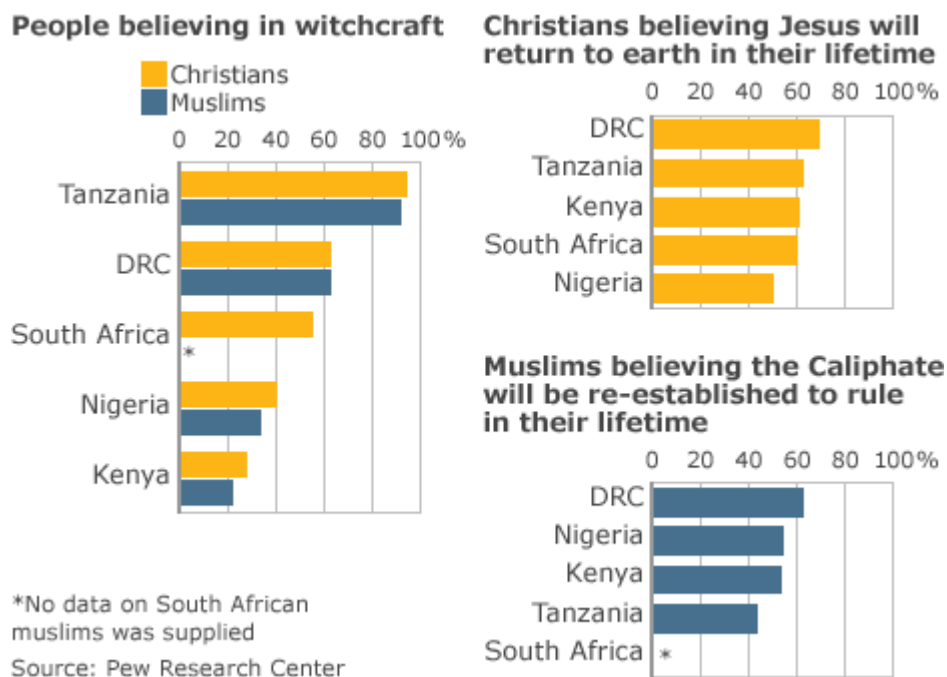
Here are 10 things we have learnt from the study, which surveyed 25,000 people in 19 countries.

1. 75% of South Africans think polygamy is "morally wrong" - bad news for their president, as Jacob Zuma took his third wife earlier this year and is engaged to a fourth. However, the survey also revealed some possible double-standards. While only 7% of Rwandans approved of polygamy (although this did include women), a rather higher number - 17% - of men said they had more than one wife.

2. An overwhelming majority of respondents disapproved of homosexual behaviour. In three countries - Zambia, Kenya and Cameroon - this was a massive 98%. Interestingly,

one of the countries with the highest numbers of people - 11% - accepting homosexuals is Uganda, where an MP is trying to get legislation passed which would punish homosexual acts with life in prison and even death in some cases. The former Portuguese colonies of Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique were also relatively tolerant of homosexuality.

3. Africa is probably the world's most religious continent, with more than 80% saying they believed in God in most countries. At least half of the Christians questioned expect Jesus Christ to return to earth during their lifetimes. In Ethiopia, 74% of Christians say they have experienced or witnessed the devil or evil spirits being driven out of a person and in Ghana, 40% of Christians say they have had a direct revelation from God. About half of all Muslims expect to see the reunification of the Islamic world under a single ruler, or caliph, in their lifetimes.



4. Zimbabwe, where the Lemba people say they are the lost tribe of Israel, was not one of the countries surveyed. But 26% of Nigerian Christians said they traced their origins back to Israel or Palestine.

5. Belief in witchcraft is also common - about 40%; a similar percentage also visit traditional healers to cure sickness. Belief in witchcraft is highest in Tanzania with 93% - this is the country where witchdoctors say that magic potions are more effective if they contain body parts of people with albinism. Ethiopia had the lowest levels of belief in witchcraft - at just 17%. Belief that juju or sacred objects can prevent bad things happening was generally lower - between 20 and 30%. In Senegal, however, 75% thought such things worked - far higher than in Tanzania (49%). It may come as a surprise to

learn that South Africa had the highest number of people - 52% - saying they took part in ceremonies of traditional religions, or honoured or celebrated their ancestors.

6. Predictably, there was also a religious split concerning alcohol, banned by Islam. Surprisingly, however, more Muslims in Chad (23%) approved of booze, than Ethiopian Christians (5%). This comes as a huge surprise to Ethiopia experts, however, who point out that it is traditional to welcome Orthodox Christian clergy with traditional honey beer when they visit your house. Maybe "alcohol" was only taken to mean spirits by some of the respondents?

7. Attitudes to divorce showed a strong divide along religious lines in Nigeria. A massive 79% of Christians thought it was "morally wrong", while among Muslims, a narrow majority (46-41%) accepted divorce.

8. In recent years, Islamist hardliners in Somalia and Nigeria have introduced strict punishment based on Sharia law, such as amputating the hands of thieves and even stoning to death for adultery. The majority of people disapproved of such Sharia punishments. In Nigeria, they were backed by about 40% of Muslims and less than 10% of Christians. However, a majority did approve of whippings and amputations in Senegal and Mali. In nearby Guinea-Bissau, even 50% of Christians backed them. This was double the rate among Muslims in Ethiopia (25%) - maybe it feels like a more realistic prospect to them, as they share a border with Somalia and most Muslim Ethiopians are ethnic Somalis.

9. The survey also asked about material well-being in the world's poorest continent. Not so long ago, Cameroon regularly topped surveys of champagne consumption per head. However, a shocking 71% of Cameroonians surveyed said there were times in the past year when they did not have enough money to buy food. In Ethiopia, which is commonly seen as a country struggling to feed itself, the rate was far lower - at 30% - the lowest of all countries surveyed.

10. Ethiopia did, however, have the lowest numbers of people - 7% - who said they regularly used the internet. Rwanda's President Paul Kagame is striving to turn his country into Africa's answer to Silicon Valley and is being helped by the arrival of several new fibre optic cables off the east coast of Africa. He will be encouraged by the finding that 30% of his countrymen - the highest number - regularly browsed the web. Mobile phones, were far more common - with 81% of respondents in Botswana owning one. Many countries reported more than 50% having phones but here, Rwanda lagged behind at just 35%.

Detentions Extended for South African Murder Suspects

(Voice of America)

14 April 2010

A South African court says two farm workers accused of killing a white supremacist leader will remain in custody until at least next month.

Court officials said Wednesday that a bail hearing for suspect Chris Mahlangu has been postponed until May 10 at the request of the man's lawyer.

Meanwhile, the French News Agency says the lawyer for an unidentified 15-year-old suspect has withdrawn a bail application.

Authorities have charged the two workers, both of them black, with murdering Afrikaner Resistance Movement founder Eugene Terre'Blanche. Terre'Blanche was found bludgeoned to death on his farm west of Johannesburg earlier this month.

Police say the killing may have stemmed from a pay dispute.

The incident has heightened racial tensions in South Africa. President Jacob Zuma has appealed for calm.

SOUTH AFRICA: Drinking the fog

(IRIN)

13 April 2010

JOHANNESBURG, 13 April 2010 (IRIN) - Gcinikaya Mpumza, mayor of a small municipality perched high in the Drakensberg Mountains of South Africa, was saddled with a huge problem: more than half the residents did not have access to water. It was a question of money.

"We are a rural municipality with insufficient revenue, and providing water with conventional systems [piping it] in most of the areas cost a lot of money," he told IRIN.

Then he chanced upon an article about harvesting water from fog by Prof Jana Olivier, a climatologist at the School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences at the University of South Africa.

Olivier has spent 20 years on research into harvesting water from fog, which originated in South Africa in 1901 and is now used in many mountainous regions across the world, she said.

The process is simple: fine mesh netting is stretched between two posts perpendicular to the direction of the wind, so as to trap and coalesce the water droplets in the fog. The water then runs down into a trough or gutter at the bottom of the panel and is collected and stored.

Mpumza contacted Olivier. In March 2010, with a budget of R300,000 (about US\$41,000) the municipality launched a project in partnership with the university and the

180 residents of Cabazane village now have access to 40,000 litres of clean water harvested from fog and stored in tanks, rather than having to walk two kilometres to the nearest stream.

Encouraged by the results of the Cabazane project, Mpumza said he had budgeted a million rand (about \$137,300) to harvest water from fog for another four villages and a town in the municipal area where he is mayor. A conventional system to pipe the water would have cost at least R40 million (about \$5.4 million).

South Africa has made tremendous strides in water delivery since 1994, when only 61.7 percent of households had access to basic water services, according to the government website; 87.2 percent of households had access by 2007.

Bleak future

Will there be enough in future? South Africa is a semi-arid country and rainfall "is spread disproportionately across the country", with far less in the north and west than in the south and east. "Water availability now and in the future is heavily dependent on climate, water use, and management and land-use practices," the website noted.

Wandile Nomquphu, Research Manager at the Water Research Commission, set up in 1971 after a period of serious shortages to examine the quality and quantity of the country's water resources, painted a stark picture.

South Africa is one of the top 30 water-scarce countries in the world, and 60 percent of the country is semi-arid. "About 98 percent of our water is allocated already, leaving only two percent to manoeuvre with," he commented.

The country did not have enough water resources to attract the industrial investment needed to create the economic growth rate of six percent required to bring down unemployment. The government website noted that "fresh water is our most limiting natural resource".

Nomquphu pointed out that one of the country's biggest manufacturing companies consumed as much water as the city of Cape Town, which has a population of about four million.

He said the government was considering tapping the Umzimvubu River, in Eastern Cape Province, the only river in South Africa that has not been dammed, and noted that "there is big potential in alternate sources of water, such as fog". South Africa has yet to conduct research into the amount of groundwater available, but "we hope to map that soon."

Climate change projections have painted a gloomy, waterless future for South Africa. "But those predictions are based on global models," Nomquphu said. "We don't know

how accurate those projections are, as they have not been scaled down to country or regional levels."

ZAMBIA: Unruly refugees sent home

(IRIN)

15 April 2010

JOHANNESBURG, 15 April 2010 (IRIN) - A shadow has fallen over Zambia's long history of generously hosting refugees from troubled countries since 36 foreigners were deported to neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), but the government says it is only trying to ensure security and order in camps that still shelter some 57,000 people.

"We are hoping that [deportations] will stop," said James Lynch, country representative for the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Zambia. The organization communicated its alarm at the expulsions to the Zambian authorities on 13 April.

Lynch told IRIN the deportees were from Meheba camp in the northwest, where a protracted demonstration by refugees over alleged corruption by officials at the settlement, run jointly by the government and UNHCR, ended violently after a police crackdown on 24 February.

"Refugees had occupied the administrative block ... [security forces] went in and dispersed some 200 people with tear gas; around 162 were arrested," Lynch said. One woman was shot and killed and several others were injured during the operation.

The first six people, "identified as the ringleaders", were sent back to DRC in February and another group of around 30 people were returned at the beginning of April, he said.

They were all taken to the Kasumbalesa border point without being told why they were being deported, or the possibility of challenging the decision under Zambian law.

Still welcome

The Zambian government said the action did not herald a less welcoming approach to its immense refugee population. "We have an impeccable record in terms of hosting refugees - our history is very long and we have hosted thousands," Zambia's Commissioner for Refugees, Jacob Mphepo told IRIN. "Zambia is one of the only countries in the region that has not produced refugees into our neighbouring countries."

Lynch said Zambia was "always a good example", and commended its regional role in dealing with refugees. The country began hosting refugees fleeing wars in nearby countries just two years after it became independent in 1964; by 2001 Zambia was hosting nearly 300,000 refugees, mainly from DRC and Angola.

Since political stability and security has improved in many of the countries generating refugees, the UNHCR's voluntary repatriation operation, in cooperation with the government, has helped tens of thousands go home to Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, and especially Angola and the DRC.

Refugee commissioner Mphepo said the deportations were necessary to guarantee security at Meheba camp, and to ensure that a protesting group of 200 people did not compromise essential services to the 14,000 refugee population. The camp's residents originated from Angola, Burundi, DRC, Rwanda, Somalia and Uganda.

An investigation by his office and the UNHCR into the corruption charges that had sparked the unrest revealed that the camp's population was becoming restless and had threatened to evict the protestors by force if the government failed to step in, and "that would have been absolute chaos".

The investigation also confirmed the allegations of corruption, but action had been taken immediately. "I personally dismissed three officers from that location," Mphepo said.

It's the law

In a statement UNHCR said it "fully shares the Government of the Republic of Zambia's interest in ensuring security and order in the refugee camps and settlements ... refugees and asylum seekers are bound to conform to the laws and regulations of the Republic of Zambia."

It also noted that "The consequence of their failure to do so, however, should be prosecution under national laws and not forcible expulsion to their country of origin."

Mphepo said the expulsion "happened, firstly, within the context of our own domestic laws, and of course the international conventions that we are party to."

Zambia's 1970 refugee control act "gives the minister the power to deal with refugees that are believed to [undermine] our quest to host the larger population of refugees ... particularly if what they are doing is threatening our capacity to provide security for the larger community of refugees," he pointed out.

These powers were "very rarely invoked – in the long history we have in hosting refugees this has only happened once before or twice," Mphepo said.

Zambia is signatory to the International Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, of which Article 33 reads: "No Contracting State shall expel or return a refugee in any manner whatsoever ... where his life or freedom would be threatened."

It also states that "The benefit of the present provision may not, however, be claimed by a refugee whom there are reasonable grounds for regarding as a danger to the security of the country in which he is."

In limbo but safe

The Zambian government insists that the deported Congolese are in no danger: "We had enough information to convince us that if these people were sent back to Congo they would not be persecuted. They are free and very safe," Mphepo said.

UNHCR spokesperson Melissa Fleming in Geneva said, "They went to a place near Lubumbashi [in DRC] ... they don't want to stay there. However, we do have people there monitoring them, counselling them, providing them with food, water and basic items. They are hoping to go back to their place of origin [Kasai Province] in DRC where we deem [it] also to be safe for them."

Mphepo said: "The only problem they have is poverty, but we have that here in Zambia too - and poverty is not one of the reasons for someone to be a refugee."

MALAWI: Clinics dispel male circumcision myths

(Alert Net)

13 Apr 2010

LILONGWE, 13 April 2010 (IRIN) - Male circumcision (MC), which can reduce HIV among men by up to 60 percent, is controversial in Malawi and government has yet to implement mass male circumcision. But a chain of private clinics has rolled out the measure with some surprising results.

Banja La Mtsogolo (BLM) – Future Family in the local Chichewa language - a private family planning organization, rolled out the procedure at its network of 30 national clinics in 2009 and is the only organization offering it as part of an HIV prevention package.

The UN World Health Organization recommends circumcision and Malawi's National HIV Prevention Strategy 2009-2013 acknowledges its role, but falls short of outlining a clear policy.

Brendan Hayes, the head of BLM, admitted that MC has been a hard sell. "In Malawi, you've got very big differences in the HIV epidemic from north to south and those differences don't correlate to differences in circumcision prevalence. High prevalence rates are in the southern part of the country, which is also where we have the most circumcision ... but you're still only talking about one in three men," he told IRIN/Plus News.

"These differences aren't totally inexplicable but I think it's made people more cautious about moving forward with male circumcision."

Confusion and controversy

Southern Malawi has a large migrant labour population and an HIV prevalence rate of about 18 percent, accounting for almost 70 percent of the country's HIV infections, according to government figures. Circumcision is culturally less prominent in northern Malawi, where prevalence rates are also lower.

The mismatch between HIV prevalence and traditional circumcision rates has raised doubts among some high-level health officials, most notably Principal Secretary for HIV and AIDS within the Presidency, Dr Mary Shawa.

Earlier this year, Shawa argued in local newspapers that she had not yet been presented with enough clinical evidence on MC, and its efficacy was questionable given high HIV prevalence rates among traditionally circumcising populations in the south.

Shawa also questioned the acceptability of the practice among ethnic groups that did not perform the procedure. [<http://www.nyasatimes.com/health/shaba-says-malawi-cannot-follow-rwanda-on-circumcision-to-fight-aids.html>]

Surprising buy-in

The BLM programme is small and resource-constrained, causing the organization to be wary of creating large-scale demand through social marketing campaigns that might outstrip its capacity, and create windows for unsafe back-alley procedures. Its clinic in the high-density neighbourhood of Kawale in Lilongwe, the capital, performs about 100 circumcisions a month at a cost of about US\$8 each.

"We're getting clients from all the major ethnic groups in basically representative proportions, so we're not just displacing the traditional circumcision sector or providing services just to Muslim clients," said Hayes.

Surprisingly, traditional circumcisers - who often carry out the procedure as a right of passage for adolescent initiates - support the clinics. Arnold Kumwenda, a BLM clinical officer, said traditional circumcisers were learning to meld traditional teachings with safer clinical circumcisions.

"Some [traditional circumcisers] do the education but they come here for the procedure," Kumwenda told IRIN/PlusNews. "When the boys go home, they stay in their homes instead of maybe going to the bush and then only after [the wound has healed] do they go."

By accompanying the boys, traditional practitioners learn about after-care and receive HIV counselling from BLM. Hayes said most BLM clients heard about the services by word-of-mouth - a good indicator of latent demand.

Word on the street

About 55 percent of men undergoing MC at Kawale made use of HIV testing services as part of the counselling process. Many came because their partners had heard of the benefits of MC, and the chance of avoiding the human papillomavirus, which could lead to cervical cancer, was also a strong incentive.

"Even I believed that circumcision was only for Muslims, but now the information is getting so widespread from [former] clients, girl friends and friends that there are lots of Christians coming," said Bertha Nyirenda, an HIV counsellor and tester at Kawale.

Protecting his partner from cervical cancer as well as partial protection from HIV made health worker Lazzar Phiri* go for circumcision after talking it over with his fiancé.

He has since become a resource for interested friends. "I sometimes talk about it with work mates, and friends have been talking about it to each other," he said. "I know ... two of them that came for male circumcision just because of me."

Hayes said BLM was looking into the feasibility of partnering with private doctors to expand its MC capacity, which might become crucial in implementing a future government rollout in a country where doctors and clinical officers are in short supply.

S. Africa looks to sea to meet growing water demand

(Alert Net)

15 Apr 2010

CAPE TOWN, April 15 (Reuters) - South Africa will increasingly use desalinated seawater to meet growing demand for drinking water in coastal towns facing the worst drought in 150 years, the country's water minister said on Thursday. South Africa is a water-scarce country with an average rainfall of 450 millimetres -- compared to a world average of 860 mm -- and conditions are expected to worsen as a result of global climate warming.

"South Africa has a boundary consisting of approximately 3,000 kilometres of sea water, and this water is presently unusable because of its high salt content," Water Affairs Minister Buyelwa Sonjica said in her budget vote speech on Thursday.

"We therefore made a decision to press ahead with unconventional water treatment, in this case desalination, largely because of the unavailability of river water due to drought," she said.

Popular tourist coastal towns Plettenberg Bay, Knysna, George and Mossel Bay are facing severe water shortages due to prolonged drought in the southern Cape region. These towns have turned to purifying seawater, as well as treating so-called grey water -- waste water generated from domestic activities like laundry and bathing -- to help meet their drinking needs.

Cape Town is also eyeing the option of desalinating water. "Desalination has become the preferred purification option in terms of both the cost benefit and the flexibility of application," Sonjica said.

However, she said the government needed to exercise caution in extending its desalination programme because of possible negative effects to the environment.

"There is ample scientific evidence that the impact of the effluents from the desalination plants on the seawater environment increase the seawater temperature, salinity, water current and turbidity," said Sonjica.

Desalination is big business in the desert conditions of some Middle East countries, where it is a major supplier of clean drinking water to economic hubs such as Dubai.

ZIMBABWE: Worrying rise in STIs among young people

(Alert Net)

14 Apr 2010

HARARE, 14 April 2010 (IRIN) - A new report by Zimbabwe's National AIDS Council (NAC), showing a dramatic rise in sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among people aged 15 to 24 in the capital, Harare, has health experts worried that the country's success in reducing HIV could be unravelling.

STIs heighten vulnerability to HIV infection, and this age group is one of the hardest hit. According to the NAC report, more than 24,000 people were treated for STIs in 2009, compared to 8,500 cases recorded in 2008; over 60 percent of the cases were women.

During this time almost 900,000 male condoms and over 155,000 female condoms were distributed in Harare. Itai Rusike, executive director of the Community Working Group on Health (CWGH), a network of civic groups that promote health awareness, blamed the rise in STIs on a too narrow focus on HIV/AIDS treatment.

"In the last two to four years we have concentrated our focus on access to treatment, especially access to ARVs (antiretrovirals), at the expense of preventive services," he told IRIN/PlusNews.

"Right now the bulk of our AIDS levy money [a percent tax on income] is going towards procurement of ARVs, to the detriment of health education awareness campaigns, especially for the young adults who are supposed to be our hope for the future."

Zimbabwe's adult HIV prevalence has been on a downward trend, dropping from 14.1 percent in 2008 to 13.7 percent in 2009.

Young people neglected

In 2009 the CWGH conducted an assessment of young people's needs for sexual reproductive health and HIV/AIDS interventions, which indicated that sex work, intergenerational relationships, early marriage, early sexual debut and unplanned pregnancy were among the challenges they faced.

In its recently published 2009 annual report the CWGH noted that young people had limited access to reproductive health information and services. "If we do not invest in preventive services, all the gains we have scored so far in HIV prevalence rate will be eroded," Rusike warned.

"Youth-led peer education activities need to be well co-ordinated and supported with financial resources, education materials, mentoring and capacity building, in order for them to be sustainable," he pointed out.

Orirando Manwere, a National AIDS Council (NAC) information officer, agreed that the rise in STI infections was an urgent call to action. "There is a need to carry out a study on why this is the trend, but generally this could be attributed to early sexual debut among the youth, unprotected sex, abuse by older men - particularly among the women and girls."

Manwere said Zimbabwe's current policy on sex education did not allow HIV/AIDS organizations to go into schools and teach young people about issues like condom use, but discussions between non-governmental organisations and government were ongoing. "It is clear that the youth are indeed sexually active and need to be empowered on sexual and reproductive health issues."

Political disruptions

AIDS activist Martha Tholanah attributed the STI increase to the violence that occurred in the aftermath of the March 2008 election.

"Youths were used to target other youths - we had reported cases of a sexual violence, which I do not think were followed up adequately, as many actors were very fearful of the repercussions if they dealt with these issues."

Many organizations, especially those working with young people, are still struggling to get on their feet after the economic and political disruptions of 2008 and beyond.

"I do not think many organisations working on sexual and reproductive health have regained the impetus they had before political and economic disruptions," Tholanah commented. "I believe we will still see more negative health effects resulting from that era."

SOUTH AFRICA: Racist's Death Highlights Rural Tension

(IPS)

13 April 2010

DURBAN, Apr 13 (IPS) - Eugene Terre'Blanche, killed on his farm on Easter weekend, is catalysing racial tension in South Africa in death much as he did in his life.

Thousands of supporters and sympathisers attended the funeral of the head of the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (Afrikaner Resistance Movement) in the rural town of Ventersdorp, in South Africa's North West Province on Apr. 9. The leader of the white supremacist organisation was killed on his farm on Apr. 3, allegedly by two of his black employees, now in custody.

The killing has put the spotlight on the tensions and violence that persist in rural South Africa between landowners - predominantly white - and black farm workers and farm dwellers.

The killing comes just as a prominent member of the ruling African National Congress party's Youth League, Julius Malema, was cited for hate speech for singing an ANC struggle song that calls on listeners to "kill the farmer". Agricultural unions representing landowners say as many as 3,000 white farmers have been murdered on farms across the country since 1994.

Farm worker organisations challenge the figure, and say black people remain subject to harassment, dispossession and assault by landowners. Terre'Blanche himself served time in prison for assaulting an employee who survived the attack, but sustained serious brain damage.

Several hundred kilometres away from Ventersdorp, in the 60 kilometres between the towns of Newcastle and Volkrust, on the northern border of KwaZulu-Natal, the landscape is tranquil enough: grazing cattle and sheep, occasionally interrupted by fields of maize, soya beans and wheat.

But race relations between the mainly white farmers and black farm-workers, and tenants in this area have been tense for decades.

Mangaliso Kubheka, leader of the Landless People's Movement (LPM), says his organisation has recorded thousands of cases of farm workers and farm dwellers being assaulted, denied water, grazing land, burial rights, cropping areas and through-ways to move from one place to another by farmers.

"Many people in the farms still live in fear, grinding poverty and landlessness. Some are forced to drink dirty water that they share with cows because farmers deny them access to clean water. Our people are assaulted and are prone to diseases because of living in these inhumane conditions," Kubheka told IPS.

Robin Barnsley, the president of the KwaZulu-Natal Agricultural Union (KWANALU), admitted that some farmers in the province are abusing the rights of farm workers and tenants but he said farm relations in the province have come a long way.

"One would not want to generalise, but there are places where there are tensions and frustrations and there are areas where relationships are good and sound. There are farmers who are mistreating people living in the farms. But these farmers are a tiny minority. I would say it boils down to personalities and other issues related to those personalities," he said.

Barnsley said most of the tension results from the slow pace of land reform. "I think the officials dealing with land reform are not doing their jobs properly and this leads to frustrations from communities who have lodged claims are waiting years for their claims to be finalised."

He adds that some farmers have taken the initiative to help farm labourers by providing them with land for free. "There a number of these initiatives. One that comes to mind is between Ladysmith and Bergville and another one in Melmoth. Apart from this, (there is the) KWANALU development desk which helps mentoring small farmers and communities engaging in commercial farming."

Land rights activists concede that there some farmers have accepted and even participated in land reform and the dismantling of apartheid's legacy in rural areas. Philani Kubheka (no relation to the LPM's Kubheka) is head of a project near Ladysmith, where a farmer has donated a few hectares to farm tenants, where they have planted potatoes, cabbages and other vegetables.

"Families living in this farm keep some of the food and sell the rest. We are grateful to this farmer and wish other farmers could take a leaf from him," says Philani.

Speaking from a modest office in the provincial capital, Pietermaritzburg, Musa Zakwe, the deputy director of the Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA), says his organisation has compiled a list of hot-spots where most abuses take place, including the district in which Newcastle and Volkrust fall. AFRA has been chronicling abuses on farms and and trying find solutions since 1979.

"Although the South African Constitution and laws protect people in the farms against abuses, the reality on the ground is that their rights are abused on a daily basis. What is even worse is that police don't take their concerns seriously because they tend to listen to farmers (rather) than to farm labourers or tenants," he told IPS.

Zakwe adds that government agencies have been too lenient on abusive farmers and that land reform policies have been far too slow to have any effect in improving the lives of people living in the farms.

He says in the main farmers are clinging on to land they barely use in the hope that government will pay more for it eventually, but unrest is on the increase amongst landless people as the wait for land drags on.

"We have tried to meet with (farmers) to resolve these issues and find amicable solutions so that we could live together and share the land, but many of them ignore us," says the LPM's Kubheka. "They tell us that we must go to the government and solve the problem there," he said.

"It is not that we like or condone what happened to Terre'blanche," Kubheka says. "Many people think his killing was planned but I beg to differ. Why do you think a 16-year-old boy (developed) such hatred that propelled him to commit such a crime? If my child grows up seeing me being assaulted and belittled daily, he grows up with that hatred and one day he may want to avenge my sufferings, without any instigation or incitement from me."

Spotlight on Human Trafficking Before World Cup in South Africa

(Voice of America)

13 April 2010

As South Africa prepares to host the FIFA 2010 World Cup, international organizations and local non-governmental organizations are warning the event will bring with it a huge increase in human trafficking. But a recent study indicates that while the problem is severe it may not be as extensive as has been suggested.

"What is human trafficking? It is modern day slavery; a violation of human rights; a crime against humanity; it is just plain evil, and it is happening - right here, right now in South Africa. Not only is it already happening - it is going to get worse."

If this public service announcement is to be believed, tens of thousands of people will be trafficked in South Africa during the month-long 2010 World Cup in June and July. But Carol Allais of the University of South Africa, UNISA, says such claims are exaggerated.

"I must also say that these huge numbers that are being bandied around, so many people expected to be trafficking, 40,000, 120,000, are totally alarmist and exaggerated," Allais said.

She was the team leader of a recent study on trafficking in South Africa, although the report also touched on Zimbabwe, Swaziland and Lesotho. Allais says at present the number of people trafficked to, in or from South Africa each year is currently not known, but that the real figure is more likely to be in the hundreds than in the thousands. But, she says, trafficking is a very real problem in this country.

"There is enough even from the little bits of quantitative data that we manage to get hold of , and a lot of anecdotal data from various, from a range of stake holders; it is definitely a problem and a lot of people are at risk," Allais said.

The study led by Allais is the first comprehensive investigation done in South Africa - it was commissioned by the country's National Prosecuting Authority and done under the auspices of the Human Sciences Research Council in Pretoria. But researchers said their ability to investigate the problem was severely curtailed because governments in the region do not gather statistics on trafficking, and because the team was not given names and details of government officials dealing with it.

Up to now, only the International Organization on Migration has kept statistics and those are confined to the cases they deal with. The IOM's program manager for counter-trafficking and irregular migration, Mariam Khokhar, tells VOA that since 2003 they have dealt with 310 trafficked people in South Africa. Khokhar says this is just the tip of a much larger iceberg.

"These are cases that have been detected. There are cases that have not been detected and those must be very many more we believe, because there is not a focus on trafficking in persons in the region," Khokhar said.

UNISA's Allais says there is not a significant number of South Africans being trafficked to other countries. Instead, she says, the study reveals that South Africa has a problem with people, mostly young women, being trafficked internally and is also a destination for people trafficked from the African continent and from further afield, primarily Thailand. Most are destined for the sex industry.

Sister Colleen Wilkinson, of the Catholic Sisters of Mercy, runs a shelter for trafficked women in Pretoria. She says the shelter has taken in 156 mostly young women since 2004, and that 98-percent are Thai trafficked to brothels in Pretoria. She says it seems that nationals of both countries are complicit in the trade.

"It looks like a combination of South African and Thai, in some sort of partnership. But I do not know about all the cases, just some of the cases have been a mixture of Thai and South African," Wilkinson said.

As in other countries, international crime syndicates are often involved in trafficking people into South Africa, often alongside other criminal activities such as illicit drugs and money laundering.

South Africa has signed and ratified the U.N. Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Person, especially Women and Children. National legislation against human trafficking is at present before parliament, and is expected to be adopted before the start of the 2010 World Cup. Awareness workshops are being conducted in schools and law enforcement agencies.

But Allais says much more needs to be done including setting up a trafficking information management system, skills training for government officials, accelerated information campaigns and incorporating teaching about the dangers of human trafficking at primary and secondary schools.