

Zimbabwe: Corruption Timeline

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March 1992 – Prompted by the distribution of wealth in the nation—Zimbabwe's 70,000 whites account for less than 2 percent of its population, yet own 70 percent of all land—Parliament approves the Land Acquisition Act. The new law, backed by President Robert Mugabe, establishes a system allowing the state to seize white-owned farms while offering little compensation and allowing no appeal. The new system favors distributing the land to "more capable" farmers rather than the poorest, and focuses on developing the black commercial farming sector. However, lacking any transparency whatsoever, the system is soon rife with accusations of cronyism and is declared a failure.

April 1995 – Five opposition parties boycott the parliamentary election, claiming it would not be free or fair. In an election where 57 percent of the electorate turns out, Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union / Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) wins 118 of 120 seats, while a ZANU offshoot wins the remaining two seats. In the aftermath of the election, one independent candidate, former ZANU-PF member Margaret Dongo, receives a second round of balloting after the High Court discovers that the total number of votes cast was 2,000 more than the number of registered voters. Dongo subsequently wins a follow-up election in November 1995, becoming the third opposition member of Parliament.

March 1996 – Robert Mugabe wins 93 percent of the vote in an uncontested presidential election. His two opponents withdraw a week before the election, and one is subsequently jailed. The official turnout is only 32 percent, the lowest since independence in 1980, which brought Mugabe into power.

March 1997 – The War Victims Compensation Fund is suspended pending an investigation that high-level government officials and their relatives had looted more than US\$450 million in only eight months. The suspension prompts violent demonstrations and riots by veterans of Zimbabwe's civil war, a key constituency of the president and his ZANU-PF party. Mugabe eventually concedes to pay out more than US\$2 billion in unbudgeted funds to placate the veterans.

July 1997 – *The Sunday Independent* discovers that Zimbabwe sold weapons, supplies, and soldiers to support new leader Laurent Kabila of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire). The paper estimates that Mugabe had authorized the sale of US\$38 million in weapons to Kabila's forces, and later estimates that Zimbabwe had transferred US\$200 million in goods and material to Kabila. Additional contracts between Kabila and state-owned Zimbabwe Defence Industries (ZDI) arrange to supply the Congolese army with hundreds of millions of U.S. dollars' worth of food and military gear.

December 1997 – Led by Secretary-General Morgan Tsvangirai, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) launches a massive general strike to protest a package of new taxes designed to pay war veterans their pensions. The strike spreads, and dissent grows against the Mugabe regime. Amidst the strike, Mugabe agrees to pay Z\$2.5 billion to nearly 50,000 war veterans, with a lump sum payment of Z\$50,000 plus monthly installments of Z\$2,000 for the rest of their lives. The struggling economy collapses soon thereafter.

August 1998 – Mugabe begins sending one-third of the army—approximately 11,000 troops—into neighboring Congo. The war proves to be unpopular with most Zimbabweans. As casualties mount and Mugabe's cronies become rich from diamonds and other resources, war veterans complain that they had never been properly compensated for their services to the country.

June 1999 – Mugabe appoints a highly partisan commission dominated by his own ZANU-PF party to draw up a new constitution to replace the one drafted at Lancaster House in December 1979, which brought the country independence. After widely consulting on the draft, the commission presents it to the government, whereupon Mugabe adds a section mandating that farmers should be compensated by the "former colonial power" for land acquired as part of the proposed land resettlement program. Mugabe schedules a referendum for the following February.

September 1999 – The opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) forms. Its roots are in trade unions, civil society groups, professional groups, and a broad coalition of citizens who search for social change, including the ZCTU. The MDC is the first viable opposition group to emerge in Zimbabwe since independence.

February 2000 – Squatters and ZANU-PF war veterans seize hundreds of white-owned farms, throwing Zimbabwe into a crisis. During a non-binding national referendum, Mugabe's draft of a new constitution—which would entrench his personal power, allow him to dissolve Parliament at will, and permit governmental seizure of white-owned land without compensation—is defeated by 53 percent of the electorate, giving Mugabe his first electoral defeat in nearly 20 years in control of Zimbabwe.

Mugabe announces on state-run TV that he will respect the will of the people.

April 2000 – Undeterred by the defeat of his referendum, Mugabe forces through Parliament a constitutional amendment that places an obligation on the United Kingdom—as the former colonial power—rather than the state of Zimbabwe to compensate citizens evicted in the resettlement program. The U.K. immediately rejects the law as unenforceable, noting that one sovereign state cannot use its constitution to impose conditions on another sovereign state. At the time the law is passed, two-thirds of the 4,000 white-owned farms had been purchased after independence, and were not colonial holdovers.

June 2000 – In parliamentary elections, Mugabe's ZANU-PF narrowly defeats the MDC, led by Morgan Tsvangirai, but loses the power to change the Constitution. At least 37 people die during rioting and election violence, the majority of them opposition members. Of the contested seats, Mugabe's ZANU-PF wins 62 compared with MDC's 57. The MDC alleges vote-rigging and systematic pre-election violence in 37 districts, filing several legal challenges, several of which are successful. About 400 international observers are on hand to witness the election, and the consensus is that the ZANU-PF is responsible for most of the pre-election violence, though the balloting process itself is mostly orderly.

July 2000 – The government launches its "fast track" resettlement program of land reform, with the goal of resettling 162,000 families on some 5 million hectares of white-owned farmland within four years. Soon, 1,250 commercial farms are occupied by ZANU-PF party members, war veterans, and other squatters who used the government's hands-off attitude to build houses on private land. The program eventually benefits Mugabe's ministers and officials rather than the landless poor, and the economic consequences are disastrous when skilled farmers are pushed off their land to make way for unskilled laborers. The program encompasses an institutionally violent and lawless component, with black war veterans being given free reign to usurp control of white-owned farms at will.

October 2000 – The United Nations Development Programme issues an Experts Report confirming that there was essentially no agricultural plan in Zimbabwe, and that the government was simply dumping unskilled laborers onto farmland without establishing an infrastructure with which to be effective. As a result, Zimbabwe is wracked by food shortages and gross mismanagement, which lead to nationwide famine.

October 2000 – Mugabe issues a presidential decree granting amnesty to all politically motivated crimes committed between January 1 and July 31, 2000. The crimes not included in the amnesty are murder, rape, robbery, and other serious charges. The decree permits the immediate release of people imprisoned in the previous spring's campaign of violence leading up to the 2000 election. Human rights groups condemn the amnesty, declaring that it will encourage future political violence during elections.

March 2001 – Chief Justice Anthony Gubbay of the Supreme Court is forced to retire after repeated government threats, including direct, personal threats allegedly made by Joseph Chinotimba, an outspoken war veteran and associate of Mugabe. A longtime friend and former cabinet member of Mugabe is sworn in as the new chief justice.

April 2001 – Following an investigative mission to Zimbabwe the previous month, the International Bar Association publishes a report criticizing the government for its campaign of intimidation against the judiciary, notably the forced resignation of the chief justice. The report also condemned the government's refusal to obey and enforce court orders mandating that squatters leave the farms they have occupied.

November 2001 – The government once again amends the Land Acquisition Act, this time to allow it to immediately confiscate land without offering the owners any right to contest the seizures.

January 2002 – The government cracks down on civil liberties through two draconian new measures:

- The Public Order and Security Act effectively eliminates freedom of expression and makes several barriers to organizing an opposition. The vaguely written law imposes severe penalties on anyone suspected of plotting against the government, as well as making prejudicial statements against the government.
- The government enacts the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, which targets independent media by requiring licenses from domestic journalists while creating barriers for foreign news coverage by restricting press accreditation to foreign journalists. The law also criminalizes defamation of the president and prohibits coverage of certain government functions, such as the results of cabinet meetings. The law takes effect in March 2002, and though some of the act is declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in May, the law is in full force during the election campaign.

February 2002 – The European Union imposes sanctions on Zimbabwe and withdraws its election observers after team members are barred from performing their duties. The sanctions are extended the following February after the situation in Zimbabwe does not improve.

February 2002 – In the run-up to the March elections, an Australian television station broadcasts a videotape reportedly capturing opposition leader and presidential candidate Morgan Tsvangirai plotting to kill President Mugabe. The tape shows an employee of a public relations firm, which Mugabe had employed in the past, talking about murdering and eliminating Mugabe. The tape does not show Tsvangirai endorsing the plot, though he does not denounce it either. Later, he claims that the tape

was doctored, and threatens to sue the Australian television station that aired the report. Though Tsvangirai is allowed to run for election, he is charged with treason by the government.

March 2002 – Mugabe wins re-election in what international and opposition observers say was a deeply flawed process. Thirty members of the opposition are killed in the months prior to the election, and several report torture and other violence committed against them (Zimbabwe is not a party to the U.N. Convention Against Torture). Operatives of ZANU-PF attacked judges and harassed the independent media, and pushed forth a campaign of systematic torture, rape, violence, vote manipulation, and media restriction. Following the election, the Commonwealth suspends Zimbabwe from its Councils after its election observers note that the election was unfair and did not embody the will of the electorate.

April 2002 – A state of disaster is declared. The government blames drought for food shortages, but the U.N. World Food Programme blames disruption of the agricultural sector.

May 2002 – Private TV station Joy TV loses its lease, effectively shutting down the only station which had allowed critical commentary of Mugabe, such as televising opposition leaders.

June 2002 – Under the updated Land Acquisition Act, white farmers may now be ejected automatically from their land, and production of food by white farmers is criminalized.

October 2002 – The U.N. World Food Programme suspends distribution of emergency aid to southwestern Zimbabwe after tons of food had been diverted to Mugabe supporters. Several sources had noted that WFP aid had only been given out to ZANU-PF strongholds, and that the government was using the limited food supply in conjunction with a devastating famine in order to systematically starve the opposition.

October 2002 – The U.N. Expert Panel on Congo presents a final report to the Security Council, chronicling systematic looting and exploitation of the country by foreign governments, including Zimbabwe. The panel indicates that the senior military leadership of the operations in Congo has personally enriched itself during the conflict and is working to establish and promote new businesses in the event of military withdrawal.

November 2002 – Agriculture Minister Joseph Made announces an end to the land grab of white property. He claims that the government has taken 35 million acres from white farmers. According to the U.N. Development Programme and several NGOs, an estimated 500,000 farm laborers and their families are left unemployed and internally displaced by the end of 2002.

February 2003 – The treason trial of Morgan Tsvangirai begins. The star witness, Ari Ben Manashe, a Canadian consultant and former Israeli spy, admits that he received US\$200,000 from the government after providing the secretly recorded tape purporting to show that Tsvangirai was involved in a plot to assassinate Mugabe.

March 2003 – A general strike organized by the MDC is met with numerous beatings and over 400 arrests by government forces. The government subsequently cracks down on those it suspects of leading the strike, and arrests five members of Parliament.

June 2003 – Opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai is arrested twice and held in police custody during a week of protests. He appears in court wearing leg irons.

September 2003 – The government refuses to issue a license to the independent newspaper, the *Daily News*, effectively shutting down the last media entity that looked critically at the government.

September 2003 – Continuation of the ongoing treason trial of Morgan Tsvangirai, the longest trial in Zimbabwe history, is postponed for six weeks.

October 2003 – Human Rights Watch releases a report charging the government with using its limited, state-run food supply as a means of political control. While 5 million of Zimbabwe's more than 12 million people are unable to obtain enough food to live, the government agency charged with food distribution—the Grain Marketing Board—regularly refuses to sell food to anyone who is not a member of ZANU-PF.

December 2003 – After nearly three days of bitter talks at a summit of the 54-member Commonwealth, Zimbabwe announces plans to quit the organization after its 18-month suspension is extended for another two years. Mugabe himself had been barred from attending the summit.

December 2003 – Morgan Tsvangirai's treason trial resumes. Final arguments are made in February 2004; the judge announces he will need six months to study the evidence before arriving at a verdict.

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