

13 November 2006

## **Zimbabwe Has the Lowest Life Expectancy in the World**

*Zanu PF regime Doesn't Care About Its People and Is Deliberately Engaged In A Course of Conduct Designed to Subjugate An Entire Nation*

As some of you know I have been speaking recently about the appalling fact that Zimbabwe now has the lowest life expectancy in the world (women 34 and men 37). Some of you may have wondered whether I had my facts right. It is often hard to graphically illustrate the scale of death in Zimbabwe and as a result the enormity of what is going on is not appreciated by many. In this morning's Herald newspaper (Government controlled) there is the following little story tucked away:

“Most Harare cemeteries almost full. A critical shortage of burial space is looming in Harare, as most cemeteries are almost full owing to high mortality. A recent report from the Town Planning Department noted that the current active cemeteries, Mabvuku, which is 75 percent full, Warren Hills and Granville A and B were filling up at a very fast rate.

At the rate at which people are dying, the four cemeteries may last for only about a year before they fill up.”

This story is just the tip of the iceberg. Cemeteries are filling up throughout the country. But no blood is being spilt – people are just fading away, dying quietly and being buried quietly with no fanfare – and so there is little international media attention.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) figures released earlier this year ([http://www.who.int/whr/2006/annex/06\\_annex1\\_en.pdf](http://www.who.int/whr/2006/annex/06_annex1_en.pdf)) which have attracted hardly any media attention and yet they should shout out the gravity of the situation for those who care. It is important to note that these figures relate to 2004 since when the situation in Zimbabwe has worsened dramatically.

I highlight below a few comparative life expectancy figures:

Afghanistan: men 42 women 42  
Cuba: men 75 women 80  
North Korea: men 65 women 68  
Iraq: men 51 women 61  
Sudan: men 56 women 60  
Zimbabwe: men 37 women 34

Zimbabwe is not a nation at war. It used to be able to feed itself and its neighbours. Zimbabwe used to have one of the highest life expectancy rates in Africa, up with South Africa. And these figures cannot just be blamed on AIDS. Our neighbouring countries have the same incidence of AIDS as us but their life expectancy figures are better (some substantially better) than ours as is demonstrated below:

Zambia: men 40 women 40  
Mozambique: men 44 women 46  
Botswana: men 40 women 40  
South Africa: men 47 women 49

The reason Zimbabwe has the lowest life expectancy in the world is because there is no other country in the world where there is the following unique combination of factors:

- one of the highest HIV/Aids infection rates in the world;
- pathetic amounts spent on ARV medication by a Government that is more concerned about importing military aircraft from China than it is in protecting the lives of its people;
- the fastest declining economy in the world;

- the highest inflation rate in the world – over 10 times the next highest rate
- Myanmar has a rate of 70%, Iraq, a Nation at war 40%;
- the forcible displacement of some 700,000 of the urban poor last year (UN figures) and the bulk of these people still homeless over a year on;
- several million people facing starvation;
- a Government which deliberately underplays the extent of the malnutrition crisis for political/propaganda reasons and on occasions frustrates the operations of the WFP and other humanitarian organisations.

In August 2002 Didymus Mutasa, presently the Minister for State Security (and the person in charge of Zimbabwe's secret police) said "We would be better off with only six million people, with our own people who support the liberation struggle; we don't want all these extra people." Since he made those remarks the Government has deliberately withheld food aid from people in need and has made it incredibly difficult for humanitarian NGOs to operate. Human rights organisations have documented how food has been used as a political weapon. In the High Court judgment delivered on the 10th October 2005 in the case of Elton Steers Mangoma versus Didymus Mutasa, Judge Makarau, made the following finding at page 23:

"I am satisfied that throughout the constituency, villagers were threatened with the withholding of food and other handouts and were denied these if they supported the MDC. It was made clear to villagers that supporting the MDC meant going without food and other handouts. The practise of withholding food and agricultural inputs was however not confined to one part of the constituency. It was practised in urban Headlands, in the resettlement areas and in the communal areas. The perpetrators of this practice were the leadership of ZANU PF at the village levels and the war veterans residing in the constituency."

In May 2005 the Government of Zimbabwe launched Operation Murambatsvina, a programme of mass forced evictions and demolitions of homes and informal businesses. The UN report released on the 22nd July 2005 estimated that 700,000 people had lost their homes, livelihoods or both. The report also stated that the Operation was carried out "with indifference to human suffering, and, repeated cases, with disregard to several provisions of national and international legal frameworks". A recent report of another NGO, The Solidarity Peace Trust, has found that in some instances half those evicted last year have already died – a direct result of this calculated act by the Government of Zimbabwe.

With an estimated 3,500 Zimbabweans now dying every week (cf. Iraq with 700 per week) it would appear that the Zanu PF regime now either doesn't care about its people or is deliberately engaged in a course of conduct designed to subjugate an entire nation. In the process hundreds of thousands arguably are dying every year in Zimbabwe; deaths which are largely preventable.

International Law has something to say about this:

Article 7 (1) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines, inter alia, Crimes against Humanity as the acts of "Extermination" (paragraph [b]) and "Other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health" (paragraph [k]) "when committed as part of a widespread attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack".

Article 7 (2) (a) of the Statute states that an "attack directed against any civilian population" means "a course of conduct involving the multiple commission of acts (including extermination and inhumane acts) against a civilian population, pursuant to or in furtherance of a State or organizational policy to commit such attack". In other words "attack" does not mean necessarily a "military" attack.

Article 7 (2) (b) of the Statute states that "Extermination" includes "the intentional infliction of conditions of life, inter alia the deprivation of access to food and medicine, calculated to bring about the destruction of part of the population".

In my view crimes against humanity have been committed, indeed are still being committed, by the Zimbabwean Government against the Zimbabwean people. But the international community is complicit because it is looking the other way.

Article 1 (B) of the Core Principles of the International Responsibility to Protect Doctrine states:

“Where a population is suffering serious harm, as a result of internal war, insurgency, repression or state failure, and the state in question is unwilling or unable to halt or avert it, the principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect”

The international community is failing in its duty to protect Zimbabwean women and men who can now only expect to live until the ages of 34 and 37 respectively. The silence and inactivity of the international community regarding this catastrophe is profoundly shocking.

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