



Press Roundtable in Pretoria

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Ambassador to South Africa Eric Bost, Ambassador to Zimbabwe James McGee
 Sheraton Hotel
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A/S Frazer: Good afternoon, thank you all for coming. I'll give a short statement and then I'll be happy to take questions. Secretary Rice sent me to the Southern Africa Region to consult with the region's leaders on Zimbabwe and to address other bilateral issues. I am traveling with Mr. Bobby Pittman, the Special Assistant to President Bush, at the White House and Senior Director for African Affairs at the National Security Council. I am also here today with Ambassador Eric Bost, the U.S. Ambassador to South Africa, and Ambassador James McGee, the U.S. Ambassador to Zimbabwe who met us here to help update us on the events on the ground in Zimbabwe.

On Zimbabwe, the U.S. is increasingly concerned about the violence and human rights abuses taking place in Zimbabwe after the election. There have been many documented reports of civilians being beaten by Zimbabwe security forces, so-called War Veterans and youth militia. This is creating an environment of intimidation and violence. South African, U.S. and other journalists have been arrested; NGO officials have been detained. And so we feel that the political space in Zimbabwe has closed and that makes it very difficult for any notion of a run-off if we had results that suggested that there should be a run-off.

We have also joined with other leaders, from the U.N. Secretary Ban Ki Moon, to the SADC leaders, to the African Union and European leaders in calling on ZEC, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, to release the results of the election, but more than three weeks since the election, we now doubt the credibility of any results that would be released. There has been no clear chain of custody, of the ballots, and so it is hard for us to accept that any results at this point would have credibility. We do know, however, that right after this election early reporting by independent observers, particularly the Zimbabwe Election Support Network ZESN projected that Mr. Tsvangirai won the election with 49.4% with a 2.4% margin of error. They had Mugabe projected at 41.8% with a 2.6% margin of error; and Mr. Makoni at 8.2% with a 1.1% margin of error. Those are the best numbers we have. Mr. Tsvangirai has also claimed to have won by 50.3%, which would be within ZESN's margin of error. So the most credible results we have to date are a clear victory for Morgan Tsvangirai in the first round and perhaps a total victory. We don't know if he goes more than 50% and we may never know given how long it has taken for ZEC to release its vote—the tally on the Presidential election. But what we do know is that the Zimbabwean people voted for change and that we feel that the will of the people must be respected. It must be respected by the Mugabe government; it must be respected by the Southern Africa Development Community leaders; it must be respected by the African Union and all of us in the international community.

And so my visit here is to consult with the region to see how they feel we must move together to respect that result -- that the people voted for change -- and to see how we can end this election crisis and stop the human rights abuses that are taking place today in Zimbabwe.

And with that I will take any questions about Zimbabwe or any other issues on the continent, I'm happy to take.

Q: Waldimar Pelsler, Media24, Johannesburg. What is your view of the role that South African President Thabo Mbeki has been playing as a mediator mandated by the Southern Africa Development Community in Zimbabwe? A mandate that was renewed this weekend at a meeting in Mauritius. Do you believe it is going smoothly?

A/S Frazer: Well I think that the original mandate was to negotiate between ZANU-PF and MDC to create an environment in which there can be a credible election. And, in many ways, the people of Zimbabwe by coming out in a relatively non-violent way and in a relatively peaceful environment were able to fulfill that mandate -- by voting in an election and expressing their will.

So, we recognize that mandate. We recognize that it has been fulfilled. We even think it has been quite innovative in allowing the people a chance to vote for change and that particularly was with posting of the ballots at the polling stations so that everybody could see who actually won the election this time. So that is really a very important role that South Africa has played.

The problem today is how do you address the post-election crisis that is taking place? And there we believe that we all have a mandate; we all have a responsibility to support that peaceful expression of the public's will. And so that is why I am here, to consult with the South Africans and others in the region. That's why President Bush has made phone calls to some of the leaders in the region. That's why Secretary Rice has also been quite engaged, that's why Ban Ki Moon is involved, because we have a post-election situation today and it is going to take all of us, I think, to bring this to a conclusion that respects the will of the people and creates another environment of peace and non-violence which we don't have today in Zimbabwe.

Q: Celia Dugger with the New York Times. The Chinese have announced today that the ship is going back to Zimbabwe and on to China. It wasn't clear who had privately told the Chinese "we're not going to let you dock." Was there solidarity from some of the other countries in the region, from Mozambique, from Namibia, from Angola?

A: I think the first credit for that ship being turned around and those arms not being put in the hands of the security forces in Zimbabwe belongs to the unions here in South Africa. Because when they refused to off-load that ship they created a leadership moment that all the rest of us were able to follow.

Yes, it is my understanding that countries in the region then declined to have that ship off-load those weapons anywhere else in this region. I believe that they headed from South Africa to Mozambique and were asked not to stop, and then there were reports that they were moving towards Angola. I don't know whether the Angolans told them not to stop there or they just decided they had had enough and that they had heard very clearly from President Mwanawasa and others that now was not the time to ship weapons into Zimbabwe when the security forces are deployed throughout the country beating up civilians and election officials and trying to intimidate people into perhaps changing their vote.

So I think that the credit first and foremost goes to the civil society, the unions here in South Africa and civil society in South Africa.

Q: Jean-Jacques Cornish, Radio 702: You didn't address the issue of the recount that is now taking place. You said any credibility of any result would now be in doubt. Recount or not would that be? Or were you specifically referring to the Presidential vote?

A: I was in that instance referring to the presidential vote, but I could say the same about the recount because the counting should take place in the presence of the parties. It should be taking place in a very transparent fashion with all of the parties participating. And as far as I know that is not occurring. And so that suggested the credibility of even the recount has to be called into question.

And again, the time lapse when the election happened and what has happened to those ballots in between again raises doubts about the credibility about any counting that is taking place today.

Q: Tshepo Ikaneng from the SABC Radio: What's Washington's view of civil society in terms of the message coming from President Mbeki in terms of the crisis in Zimbabwe and the fact that it has been counteracted by the president of the ANC, the ruling ANC, who seems to be adopting a more tougher stance about what is happening in Zimbabwe. Do you think he has managed to display courage in the midst of what has been like a denial from our President?

A: Well I think that it is very important, the voice of the ANC, because the ANC is a liberation party. And I think the ANC can speak very clearly to the Zimbabwe people and to the Zimbabwe parties, particularly to ZANU-PF, to say to ZANU, "Look, the point of liberation was to give the people the free expression of their will, for the rule of law to be respected. And so for the ANC as a party to speak unequivocally to this issue I think is extremely important and we certainly welcome that voice.

We think in a situation like we have in Zimbabwe you have to be morally clear, and you have to stand on the side of the people themselves. Who actually demonstrated great courage to come out and express their will. And I know that the South African people and I would imagine, South African government, and certainly the parties would want the South African people to have a free expression of their will through the vote. And so why not for the Zimbabweans as well? And so we welcome the voice of the ANC.

Q: Paul Simao, Reuters. Is the United States considering tightening sanctions on the Mugabe government? And would you call for an embargo on all flow of arms to the country?

A: We think that the idea of Prime Minister Gordon Brown's of an arms embargo is a good one. And certainly in a situation where the security apparatus may even be in charge of the country, in the sense that we are not clear, we haven't heard from President Mugabe lately, and there have been many reports that it is the security apparatus that is unwilling to accept the results of the election. And so we of course hold President Mugabe accountable, but we do have to question whether we should be sending arms in when we have credible reports and documented accounts of people being attacked by police and, as I said so-called war veterans and others. And so, yes, we think it is an important issue to raise and certainly one that we will consider seriously. The United States will consider seriously. And we welcome the initiative of Prime Minister Gordon Brown and after all, this is a cabinet that was dismissed before the election. So what is this government? What legitimacy does this government have for receiving such arms?

Q: Celean Jacobson, Associated Press: There seems to be a growing call for a government of national unity in Zimbabwe. You were in Kenya recently -- do you think that is a model that you are supporting and will be bringing up in your discussions with regional leaders?

A: Well, I think Kenya and Zimbabwe are different cases. And I know that Kenya is the latest election crisis so many people refer back to it. We think in this situation that according to the credible reports that we have, we have a clear victor. Independent, the ZESN is an independent election support network. And according to their results, Morgan won and perhaps won outright. It is not at all clear but perhaps won outright. At which point you don't need a government of national unity. You simply have to respect the outcome of the election.

Now that said, because there is a question about the credibility of that presidential vote, given that we haven't been able to have an announcement and we don't know what has happened to the ballots since March 29, there may need to be a political solution and some type of negotiated solution. But any politically negotiated solution has to respect the will of the people and the people voted for change which would mean that any such government would be led by Morgan Tsvangirai as the winner of the most votes -- as the clear winner of the most votes.

Q: (inaudible) On the issue of the recounting, you have expressed reservations but as we hear reports from Harare, they are preparing for a run-off, MDC has said it is not prepared to contest in that. What's your best advice, given the situation at the moment?

A: Well, I can't imagine how MDC would want to be in a run-off in the environment of intimidation and violence that has been created. The playing field wasn't level when they contested the first time and we urged them to contest. But it was a better playing field, very much as a result of South Africa's intervention as mediator and at SADC's insistence that there be a less violent environment. But today it has been reversed; it is just as it was in the past. And so I can't imagine that we would, the U.S. Government would push MDC to try to contest in such an environment that is operating today in Zimbabwe.

Q: Louis Olefse, SAPA: I want to ask, the Chinese go out strongly against the U.S. pressure on the arms shipment -- they are saying the U.S. is politicizing the issue. How likely is an arms embargo to work? With China, who is the major supplier of arms to Zimbabwe, is not going to.... And second on an unrelated issue, who are you meeting in South Africa. Are you meeting with the President and are you meeting with the ANC?

A: As far as the arms embargo, I would imagine that that would have to be taken up at the Security Council. And I think that the debate itself will send a great warning to others who would think about sending weapons into Zimbabwe today, including the Chinese themselves. And so there is value in even having the debate around this issue. But we would hope that China would act responsibly. I am sure that these weapons were commissioned before this post-election crisis has taken place. They should now have fair warning and not send any new weapons into Zimbabwe. If they are going to act responsibly in Africa and certainly in this particular instance, they should act responsibly and not try to send the weapons in by air or any other means.

Secondly, my trip to the region is a very short one and so since I have been in South Africa I have had a chance to meet with Minister Mufumadi and Deputy Foreign Minister Sue Van der Merwe. It is my understanding that President Mbeki is out of the country as is Foreign Minister Zuma. And I have also had an opportunity to meet with Tokyo Sexwale. As you know Jacob Zuma is out of the country as well right now. And I hope later today to meet with Morgan Tsvangirai. Then I will go on to Angola and I will have an opportunity to meet with President Dos Santos and other officials in his government and then to Zambia to meet with President Mwanawasa and officials within his government.

Q: You will see Morgan Tsvangirai here in South Africa today?

A: That is my expectation, yes.

Q: Are you saying Ambassador that the matter of Zimbabwe should then come before the U.N. Security Council?

A/S Frazer: Well certainly we believe that given the deterioration in the human rights and security environment that we have a responsibility as a Security Council to address these issues. So yes, as long as people are being beat up -- more than 242 cases of victims of beatings, several who have been killed now, villages burnt to the ground -- we can't stand back and wait for this to escalate further. And so I think as a Security Council, this issue, perhaps we can send monitors out. We can get the U.N. that is already in Zimbabwe to go out to these villages to do the reporting that is necessary, so that we can have a more thorough and better picture of the human rights situation today.

Press: My follow up question was. Do you think that there is a role for President Mugabe in the future Zimbabwean Government and what do you think it would be?

A/S Frazer: Well he contested for President and he at least lost the first round of that. Normally, when you contest for President, you're finished if you lose. That is the normal way democracies work. Now this notion of a government of national unity -- any President, if Morgan Tsvangirai becomes President of the country as the people appear to have voted for, any President can choose his cabinet from the various parties. That would actually, we believe, would be left to him to decide if he wants to have ZANU cabinet ministers as part of a reconciliation process or part of just governing, that should be left to him but, according to what we know in the first round Morgan won, the people voted for that, and there should be a change.

Press: Last one from me. Given the (inaudible) of the situation down in Zimbabwe since that you have some document and proof about human rights abuses. During the U.N. Security Council, the matter was shelved and the solidarity that was coming from African leaders and they say SADC would be able to take care of the matter. I

mean, given the fact that there is still a crisis, do you think SADC is better positioned? And given the fact that people are continuing to suffer on a daily basis, do you think they are better?

A/S Frazer: I don't think there was solidarity around not dealing with human rights issues at the Security Council by SADC members. I don't think that at all. I think that SADC at the Lusaka meeting pronounced itself on the election crisis by saying that ZEC needs to release the results and that the will of the people must be respected. And that President Mbeki should continue with his mediation role which was around the election -- but this issue of the deterioration of the human rights environment, I don't think that SADC has said that they alone should address the human rights situation in Zimbabwe. I didn't get that from their communiqué or from any of the consultations I've had with SADC leaders that somehow the AU or the UN or the international community should turn a blind eye to the violence which is taking place post election in Zimbabwe. Violence being meted out by the Government and its supporters, not by the opposition.

Q: Dominic Mahlangu, the Sunday Times: In view of this gross human rights violations in Zimbabwe, are there any moves by the international community to press charges (inaudible).....

A/S Frazer: I think that has to be on the agenda. I think that there is a space in which this crisis can be brought to an end and that is where we certainly expect SADC to show leadership. This is why I am saying the ANC, President Mbeki, other leaders of SADC need to send a very clear message to Mugabe and his Government that this violence has to end. They were able to do that leading up to the election. They were able to get a much more peaceful environment, so they know how to do it. And so we definitely believe that there is a space in which they need to send that message and the violence needs to stop. Yes, there has to be accountability. If that violence doesn't stop and that they can't come to some type of clear resolution of this election crisis, then I think that we definitely have to look at this issue of accountability.

I mean this is a Government essentially that is rejecting the will of the people. If they had voted for Mugabe the presidential result would already be announced. So everybody knows what time it is.

Ambassador Bost: I think that also to piggy back on one of the comments that the Assistant Secretary made is that, we firmly believe that SADC continues -- it is very important that they continue to have a very important role to play. I don't want anyone to take away from our comments that we are minimizing their importance or their role. We believe that they have the capacity to continue to play a very important role. We are just hopeful that they will continue to step up to the plate and do so.

A/S Frazer: As the Secretary said.

Ambassador Bost: Yes, as the Secretary said.

Ambassador McGee: Could I just say I arrived yesterday and I am very, very pleased to see the graphic but nonetheless necessary footage that I'm seeing on the electronic media here coming out of Zimbabwe. That is not being shown in Zimbabwe, not being run in the print media. So it is extremely important that you folks continue to do that job and let the world know of the excesses that are happening in Zimbabwe. Thank you.

Ambassador Bost: Other questions?

Q: Celean Jacobson, AP: If Ambassador McGee could just give us a bit more from across the border where most of us have not been allowed to go.

Ambassador McGee: The situation has changed dramatically from more than an election crisis as Assistant Secretary Frazer has said, one where we are waiting for the results of the vote to one now that has turned into a human rights crisis and a humanitarian crisis. We have over a thousand people, we call them internally displaced people (IDPs) and that number is growing every day. We have affidavits from victims and witnesses of beatings, brutal beatings. The hospitals are unable to keep track of or to take in all the people that have been injured. This is all happening in the countryside. The people are being victimized, the people are being brutalized, and it is all in the name of political power. People are told, 'if you vote for the wrong party you will be beaten. If you vote for the wrong party your homes will be burned. You will not have access to your fields.' The political space necessary for a free and fair run-off, if it leads to that, is just not happening. And that is why the situation has dramatically shifted from one of a political issue to one of a human rights issue.

Ambassador Bost: You also mentioned the burning of the grain given the people that are starving to death already.

Ambassador McGee: Last year the European Union put a massive amount of funding into food assistance for Zimbabwe. The United States Government put US \$171 million into food assistance for Zimbabwe. One of the tactics being used by the so-called war veterans and the green bombers, the youth wing of ZANU, is that they burn down the grainaries. The harvest has just come in -- we have actual pictorial proof evidence of grainaries being burned. This is an absolute intimidation of folks, if you can't eat, you can't do much of anything.

Press: If the MDC does form the next government what specific support is the United States ready to put up?

Ambassador McGee: We have looked at a comprehensive package of assistance -- humanitarian assistance that would continue. Last year, as I mentioned US \$171 million on food assistance and total package of US \$212 million, the rest being in health. We would continue that but we would also first of all drop all sanctions as long as we have proof that the principals that we have agreed upon are being met and that doesn't mean just for ZANU, that means for any party that would come to power in Zimbabwe. The agreed upon principals of human rights, of a free economic system and the return of the rule of law. Those issues would have to be met before we would open the taps, so to speak, on our development assistance. Although I don't have any specific numbers on development assistance from talking with the rest of the donor community, I think you can easily expect it to run into maybe the low billions of dollars.

Press: President Bush has been calling leaders in the continent but what kind of message is he (inaudible).

A/S Frazer: Well he phoned President Mbeki, I think it was April 4, and he has also spoken to President Kikwete. His first question is how do you see the situation and what is your strategy for resolving it. You know President Bush very much believes in consulting, and he very much believes in African leadership. And then he expresses our grave concerns about the fact that to this day we don't have the announcement of the presidential election results despite the fact that everyone knows because they were already posted. You know basically calling for the leaders to, as Secretary Rice said, step up and make sure that the will of the people is respected. So I think it is part of a process of consultation about how can we work together to resolve this crisis in a way that as few lives are lost as possible.

Press: Just a point of clarity, your meeting with Mr. Tsvangirai is very much important for us and is it possible for your feedback.

A/S Frazer: It is a private meeting. You mean after the meeting, probably tomorrow the Ambassador can give you some information about how the meeting goes. I will be on the road tomorrow.

Ambassador Bost: I can do that tomorrow.

Press: Is it here in Pretoria, can you tell us that?

A/S Frazer: I don't want you staking me out. It is in South Africa.

Ambassador Bost: It is not important where it is -- I think it is important that it is taking place. If you coordinate with Sharon, she will be able to provide you with some

feedback about the discussion. I will be available most of the day tomorrow to answer any questions that you may have.

Press: Ambassador McGee, have you had an audience with President Mugabe? Have you tried to speak to him? I know there were some issues in the beginning when you arrived.

Ambassador McGee: Yes, I presented my credentials to President Mugabe in November as every Ambassador when they arrive in their host country. We had a fairly ceremonial conversation at that point. Then recently about two months ago, I had an opportunity to have a one on one, about a one hour with President Mugabe. We went over again the principals -- the clearly established principals.

Press: Of the sanctions?

Ambassador McGee: Sanctions? We don't have sanctions -- we have targeted sanctions in Zimbabwe only.

Press: Are you suggesting that President Mugabe might not be effectively in control of Zimbabwe any more? You suggested that security forces are playing in the (inaudible) you have not heard from the President in a while. Could you just ...

A/S Frazer: Sure, the way I would describe it is that there seems to be several power centers in Zimbabwe. Certainly we have to assume that President Mugabe is one of those power centers, if not the power center. We have to assume that -- but we haven't spoken to him and many others haven't. He is not reaching out, he has been hunkered down since the election. Of course, we saw him on their national day come out very forcefully, so we have to assume that he is in control. There is also the joint operations command which is made up of the military, the police, the central intelligence organization. As I said, we have reports that it was they who intervened immediately after the election to say, "hold up, let's stop -- we [are] not going to accept these results. We are not going to accept the MDC winning this election." That is the reporting that we hear, so we assume that is a second power centre in the country. We know we have to wonder. We have seen the security apparatus fan out across the country -- we have reports that police are counting ballots, and boxes are in barracks. Now those are just reports. I can't say that we have evidence of police, you know, stuffing ballot boxes or the boxes being in the barracks but we hear these reports. So it does lead to a question of whose running the country. Since we haven't been able to talk to President Mugabe and many others haven't been able to talk to President Mugabe that question becomes even more salient.

Ambassador Bost: Ladies and Gentleman last question please.

Press: Do you foresee any chance of the military intervention that SADC might be forced to take....

A/S Frazer: I hope not. I mean frankly, I certainly hope that this can be resolved diplomatically and politically. I think that that would be in keeping with SADC tradition, that would be the best outcome for the region. It would be the best outcome for the Zimbabwean people. So we are pushing and we are working and we are encouraging diplomatic resolution and political resolution of this crisis. We are not calling for any military intervention by SADC, but we also have to be very concerned that the population has to be protected if this deterioration continues and if the security apparatus is the one that is beating people you either have to talk directly to the security apparatus. SADC can do that. They have the relationships with the military and they have the relationships with the central intelligence organization and with the police. So they should try to use that channel of communication to be very clear that this violence and this intimidation must stop. So we would hope that it could be done through that means, but we do all have to be responsible for trying to protect this population.

Press: Would the United States oppose military action by SADC?

A/S Frazer: We don't think that we are at the point where that question is the most relevant question. We think that the most relevant question right now is what more can SADC do diplomatically and politically? We think that there is a lot more that SADC can do diplomatically and politically to resolve this crisis.

Ambassador Bost: Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you, we appreciate it.

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