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**default header**

23 June 2008

**Speech by U.S. Ambassador McGee on the Precipice in Zimbabwe**  
Discusses the campaign of violence by the Mugabe regime against Zimbabweans

(begin transcript)

[U.S. Department of State]  
Presented by HE Mr. James McGee  
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at the Africa Dialogue Lecture Series  
Centre for International Political Studies, University of Pretoria  
19 June 2008

**ZIMBABWE ON THE PRECIPICE**

Thank you Dr. Solomon.

Ladies and Gentlemen it's a pleasure to be here to talk with you about the dire situation in Zimbabwe.

At independence, Tanzanian leader, Julius Nyerere, told Zimbabwe's new president, Robert Mugabe, that he had inherited the jewel of Africa. President Nyerere urged President Mugabe to protect this jewel. Zimbabwe was to be the model for a new Africa. It was the region's breadbasket. The economy's potential was limitless. An effort was being made towards racial reconciliation.

Twenty-eight years later, as I flew down from Harare this morning, I left a country on the precipice. Zimbabwe today, is teetering on the edge of lawlessness and anarchy. It is a country on the brink of starvation. It has already fallen off the precipice of economic collapse and is sinking into a seemingly bottomless abyss. These problems are the direct result of a regime that cares more about clinging to power and the personal riches it brings than it does about the welfare of its citizens. Sadly, as I stand here today, the prospects for a free and fair election that might bring change to Zimbabwe are extremely limited.

The government-directed campaign of violence and intimidation, coupled with planned electoral fraud make a free and fair election in Zimbabwe impossible. The only possible antidote is an immediate and large-scale commitment to independent electoral observation by SADC, the African Union and others. Some observers are already present and I know that many more are on the way. I welcome this development because I will be the first to admit that the influence of the United States can only go so far in Zimbabwe. The impact of Zimbabwe's crisis will be felt the most by its neighbors, and they can do the most to solve it.

The most immediate threat facing many Zimbabweans is violence and lawlessness. The campaign of violence being conducted by the Mugabe regime is out of control and shows a callous disregard for local and international laws and the most basic standards of human rights. This once proud liberation movement is willing to beat and kill its own citizens. It is willing to violate the norms of civilized societies. It is willing to violate SADC's protocols on elections. And, as I have experienced first hand, it is even willing to ignore the most basic protections for diplomats provided in the Vienna Convention.

Corruption, greed and the need to maintain themselves in power have converted freedom fighters and liberators into lawless tyrants.

I have witnessed with my own eyes the victims of this violence, and any attempt to deny it or claim it is the result of opposition activity is simply a lie. To date over 3000 people have been hospitalized and over 60 killed. Over 30,000 have been displaced from their homes and villages. And those are only the confirmed cases that

we know about.

I have received reports of a primary school principal dragged out of his office in broad daylight, never to be seen again, for no other reason than that he worked at a polling station that voted MDC in the March 29 elections. The elderly grandmother of the MDC's spokesman, whom I met in the hospital two blocks from the Embassy, was assaulted because of her grandson's activities. Children are being dragged out every night and forced to chant ZANU-PF slogans and more. I don't think it is inappropriate to call a regime willing to assault educators, the elderly and young people as lawless.

At an even more basic level, there is no Government of Zimbabwe. According to Zimbabwean law, the Parliament was dissolved before the March 29 elections. The newly elected Parliament has never been convened. We now have the situation of a regime claiming to be represented by "Ministers" who have not been appointed by any Parliament. Some of them, such as so called Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa weren't even re-elected and aren't even members of Parliament, as necessary under Zimbabwean law.

An equally serious threat for many Zimbabweans is hunger and starvation. This was once unknown in Zimbabwe but now they threaten many, including the elderly and children. Zimbabwe is not currently experiencing malnutrition on a large scale, but it soon may. Zimbabwe's harvest, devastated by the government's disastrous land policies, will once again reach record lows this year. Current estimates maintain that the harvest will only meet one-quarter of Zimbabwe's food needs. In a normal year we do not see food insecurity start until sometime in August, but my experts tell me that this year we are likely to see serious food insecurity beginning as soon as later this month. Compounding the lack of an adequate harvest is the Government of Zimbabwe's disastrous, practically criminal, decision to suspend all operations by NGOs, including those providing humanitarian assistance.

In the best of circumstances, the U.S. and other major food donors would have a hard time helping to feed the people of Zimbabwe. U.S food aid alone was \$171 million dollars last year, with more needed this year. On the way here I was pleased to hear that the Government of Zimbabwe decided to reinstate some NGO operations, but it's too little and it's too late. Zimbabwe's most needy, the elderly and the children, are still in danger of starvation. Let me be absolutely clear: the Government of Zimbabwe's actions are a direct assault on the people of Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe's disastrous harvest is but one symptom of an economy that has already gone over the precipice. The numbers are truly staggering. Inflation is over two million percent according to reliable estimates. In the past week alone the Zimbabwe dollar lost 56% of its value against the U.S. dollar. To give you some perspective on what that kind of inflation means, I have heard stories of people stranded downtown Harare because the price of a commuter bus rose from 600 million Zimbabwean dollars to 800 million dollars between the morning and afternoon commute. Routine transactions now require so many zeroes that some accounting systems cannot handle them. I was at a board meeting last week and they had to try and institute a new accounting system because of the number of zeros which is impossible to deal with.

Unemployment is over 80%. Manufacturing levels have plummeted. Businesses close their doors literally every day. Even mining, one of Zimbabwe's few remaining foreign currency earners is suffering as power cuts and lack of needed supplies cut into production. Zimbabwe's once vibrant economy is practically non-existent at this point. Those hit hardest, of course, are the poor who make up the vast majority of Zimbabwe's population.

Zimbabwe's leadership is wont to blame the country's economic problems on Western sanctions. First, the only real sanctions on Zimbabwe at present are targeted sanctions against regime leaders which prevent them from traveling to the U.S. and from doing business with U.S. firms. While the Government of Zimbabwe refers to the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZDERA) as a type of sanction, this is not the case. ZDERA prevents the U.S. from supporting international financial institution assistance, such as from the IMF or World Bank, to Zimbabwe. Even without ZDERA, international financial institutions would not lend money to Zimbabwe because of its terribly mismanaged economy and its failure to pay back prior loans. Zimbabwe owes the World Bank over 600 million US dollars.

Secondly, it is interesting to note that after Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965, general sanctions were imposed against that country.

Nevertheless, at independence in 1980, the Zimbabwean dollar was stronger than the U.S. dollar. The fact is that the collapse of Zimbabwe's economy and the hyperinflation that has rendered Zimbabwe's currency worthless are due to economic mismanagement, including payoffs to war veterans in 1997; Zimbabwe's misadventure in the Congo in 1998; and land invasions that began in 2000 and turned the bread basket of southern Africa into a basket case.

The government continues its economic mismanagement through excessive spending, the 24 hour-a-day printing of money, and maintenance of an artificial exchange rate that only benefits regime insiders. Zimbabwe will be able to emerge from the current economic abyss only when there is political reform and political will, which in turn make economic reform possible.

I wish I could stand here and say that the June 27 run-off offers the chance for political change and a brighter future. Unfortunately, the current climate makes free and fair elections practically impossible.

MDC candidate Morgan Tsvangirai is hounded at every turn, making it impossible for him to campaign. Since his return to Zimbabwe, he has been detained by the police four times. His campaign vehicles have been confiscated. The Mugabe regime is providing no political space for Mr. Tsvangirai to campaign.

Tendai Biti, the secretary-general of the MDC was arrested upon his return to Zimbabwe from South Africa last week. His crimes? Announcing March 29 election results, based on official tally sheets posted outside polling stations, before the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission announced its results. He also allegedly disseminated a document setting out MDC plans for governing Zimbabwe after the election — a document that Biti never wrote — and which was fabricated by ZANU-PF to create fear of the MDC on the part of its supporters. Biti now stands charged with treason, a crime punishable by death in Zimbabwe.

The state controlled media also contributes to the poisonous atmosphere. They routinely broadcast and publish propaganda for the regime, refuse to accept paid advertising from the opposition and slander anyone associated with the MDC. Particularly disturbing, in the past few weeks is that the state media has begun to broadcast inflammatory material designed to promote violence against the opposition party. Senior editors who opposed these policies have been fired and control of the media given to security officials.

Then there is the massive and widespread intimidation of the electorate. At first the campaign focused on areas that had traditionally voted for ZANU-PF, but which voted for the MDC on March 29. The goal of the campaign was to intimidate people into voting for ZANU-PF, or simply into not voting at all. Those who voted for the MDC, or merely live in areas that voted for the MDC, are being targeted. Mugabe has made multiple public statements that a vote for the MDC is a vote for war. It represents a betrayal of the country, and won't be respected. This is not democracy.

The campaign has now spread to include attacks on MDC officials and their families. Multiple MDC members-of-Parliament elect have been arrested or attacked since March 29. The Mugabe regime hopes to eliminate the ability of the MDC to campaign or to govern, now and in the future.

All of this makes independent regional and international observers critical. I am pleased to see that SADC and the Pan-African Parliament have already started to deploy observers in Zimbabwe. This effort needs to continue and expand to include African Union observers as well. I am pleased to report that on my way here this morning I received a text message that the African Union is sending a contingent of at least 80 election observers.

These regional efforts, and regional initiatives to push the parties towards a peaceful solution are absolutely critical. Zimbabwe's neighbors have the most to lose if the crisis continues and have, far and away, the most influence on this country. As vocal as I have been, and will continue to be, my influence and that of the United States can only go so far. The Mugabe regime has shown itself quite willing to ignore international condemnation of its heinous acts. This regime will find it much more difficult however to ignore regional leaders and pressure.

We have already seen what regional action can do, with regards to the arms shipment turned away at ports throughout southern Africa. Most notable, this effort did not start out as a governmental action, but as a protest by dock workers in Durban. When the people and governments of this region stand together, opposing

further violence in Zimbabwe, they can, and do, make a difference.

The centrality of regional actors is appropriate, given that the southern African region has the most at stake. Make no mistake: Zimbabwe's ongoing crisis is a regional crisis. Its effects are being felt outside of Zimbabwe's borders and will continue to grow more severe.

Here in South Africa I think you are only too aware of the huge numbers of Zimbabweans fleeing their country. No one really knows how many Zimbabweans have left, but estimates range up to several million or one-quarter of Zimbabwe's population.

We have all seen the tragic consequences of the large numbers of Zimbabweans in South Africa. Former Mozambican First Lady Graca Machel recently warned of the impact of population migration into Mozambique. One only has to look at the Great Lakes region to see the devastating consequences of the mass migration of people fleeing political violence. More than a decade later the region is still unstable. None of Zimbabwe's neighbors will be immune.

However many Zimbabweans have already fled, even more could depart the country if the starvation, economic collapse and anarchy continue.

The impact of Zimbabwe's troubles on the region goes beyond the millions who have fled. Zimbabwe was long known as the breadbasket of southern Africa. Given the global food crisis, the continuing disappearance of the Zimbabwean harvest is only magnified in southern Africa. People throughout Africa would benefit from increased Zimbabwean agriculture. In its absence food prices are higher and people suffer. The broader economic collapse of Zimbabwe is also felt throughout the region. Economic growth in the region is retarded by Zimbabwe's implosion.

That is why I think it is important for me to be here today. All of you in this room have a stake in what happens in Zimbabwe. What is happening right now is catastrophic. A disastrous harvest, coupled with an outrageous suspension of NGOs by the Government of Zimbabwe, threatens millions. The economy has completely imploded and anarchy lurks in the Mugabe regime's criminal campaign of violence against its own citizens. The upcoming run-off cannot provide a solution unless rapid and significant changes in the prevailing conditions occur. Zimbabwe is a country on the precipice.

However, I believe that it is not too late. I still think it is possible to bring Zimbabwe back from the precipice. A concerted international effort, led by key regional players, can change the future. If regional leaders decide to take forceful action that puts the interests of the people of Zimbabwe ahead of any entrenched political hierarchies we can avoid the catastrophe I fear.

A massive independent observation effort can slow the regime's campaign of violence, while creating more free and fair conditions for the up-coming elections. A major donor effort can stave off the impending hunger. And a new government which sets responsible fiscal policies and is willing to work with the International Financial Institutions can start to bring Zimbabwe out of the economic abyss.

It won't be quick, and it won't be easy, but we must start now, or it will be too late.

Thank you.

(end transcript)

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