

Let them eat cake – Zimbabwe Vigil Diary: 25th May 2019

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 29 May 2019 11:20 - Last Updated Wednesday, 29 May 2019 11:20

At the time of the French Revolution Queen Marie-Antoinette, when told that people had no bread, is reported to have said 'Let them eat cake'. Some 230 years later Zimbabwe's new Minister of Energy, Fortune Chasi, has made a similar remark in response to the 50% rise in fuel prices: 'Let them buy electric cars'. (See: <https://www.zimeye.net/2019/05/19/if-you-cant-get-fuel-buy-electric-cars-says-new-energy-minister/>.)

The problem is that people have no money to buy electric cars and there is no electricity to run them. With the economy in freefall, the situation in Zimbabwe is deteriorating rapidly, making the authorities increasingly jumpy in fear of a Zimbabwe revolution.

Ben Freeth, the civil rights campaigner, in his latest newsletter says: 'Sadly, there is a very significant deterioration in conditions on the economic front and in the general situation in Zimbabwe. Fuel queues are currently very long and chaotic. Electricity is sporadic. Hunger will be a major problem this year with more than half the population requiring international food aid. Prices continue to sky-rocket. Once again we have the second highest inflation rate in the world.'

Freeth says civil rights activists are increasingly targeted. 'Two weeks ago, a dear friend's daughter was abducted in a raid by Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) operatives at a venue where she was involved in training teachers about civic rights. After it was discovered that she and other teachers were missing, her lawyer father, David Drury, went to the notorious Harare Central Police Station to establish if she had been taken there.

'All knowledge of their whereabouts was denied by the police and CIO. Remarkably though, in a dark corridor, a CIO member hinted that they were there. Dave called in other lawyers to assist, and they refused to leave the police station. Eventually, after some torture had been administered, his daughter and others were released.'

Freeth continued: 'In another instance, a friend who had recently stayed with us, was abducted and tortured. Over many hours he was slapped after every question that was asked; he was also made to dig holes in the hard dry ground with his hands and had his testicles pulled.' (See: https://media.wix.com/ugd/02876c_70dde214490c4a99b5e50cab276e1a81.pdf).

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A pastor working with the poor in the Bulawayo area says there is widespread, and increasing, hardship and hunger. The harvest was about zero. Travelling up from Plumtree (Mat South) it was hard to see any sign of a harvest. There is no effective food relief programme in place. The price of food is ratcheting up steadily. Few have any real money to buy with USD but at the same time some sellers demand payment in USD. The value of the RTGS dollars is reducing steadily. The mood is angry but the anger muted on account of the prevailing fear.

The pastor's work is focused on a hundred or so destitute families who were evicted at short notice from their long-term homes by Zanu PF thugs greedy for their land.

A Vigil activist's sister, who supports the pastor, reports on the plight of some of these people. Their name have been changed.

The Moyos lived at a settlement for over 20 years. When their home was destroyed they were moved to a carpentry training centre since they had nowhere to go. The family included a young woman who was soon to give birth. They found a place to stay—in an adapted pigsty they had to clean out—shortly before she gave birth. Baby Moyo was born with a clubfoot and has neurological problems and seizures. At their former home they farmed, growing vegetables and raising livestock. They were able to eat and the children went to school. They had lots of space and the children were free to roam. Now they have no way of earning an income and have to pay rent. The children were chased from school as there was no money for fees.

Other points

- The Vigil activist's sister was asked by her pastor to write a lamentation for the evictees. She wrote the following: *'Out of the depths O Lord I cry to you for I am tempted to despair. Do you remember the work of my hands? The home, built brick by brick? The crops, watered cup by cup? Chickens in the yard and the children running free? We prayed but they still came. With batons, threats and bulldozers. Knocked us down – flat down – down – down – down. Our Mary with child and nowhere to go. I have a pigsty for rent, he said. And Mary gave birth to a girl: she was not right. We laid her in a manger. Now my hands are still, and I am tempted to despair. Have you forgotten us Lord? Our house of prayer is gone. But I do not forget you. You showed me your hands, the work of your hands I remember and I trust, my hands are still. You will bring us home.'*

- On Friday 31st May, the Vigil and its sister organisation the Restoration of Human Rights in Zimbabwe are handing in a letter to the Zimbabwe Ambassador protesting against the involvement of Embassy officials in asylum seeker interviews with the Home Office. For more

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information see 'Events and Notices'.

- Thanks to those who came early to help set up the front table and put up the banners: Shylette Chipangura, Rosemary Guveya, Jonathan Kariwo, Rosemary Maponga, Kudzai Mashiri, Lucia Mudzimu, Esther Munyira, Collen Mupazviriho, Tapiwa Muskwe, Mary Muteyerwa, Tsitsi Nyirongo, Pearl Shambare, Ephraim Tapa and Bridget Zhakata. Thanks to Rosemary Maponga and Shylette for looking after the front table, to Kudzai for handing out flyers, to Mary for drumming and to Jonathan for photos.

- For latest Vigil pictures check: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/zimbabwевigil/> . Please note: Vigil photos can only be downloaded from our Flickr website.

FOR THE RECORD: 21 signed the register.

EVENTS AND NOTICES:

- **Petition to the Zimbabwe Ambassador in the UK.** Friday 31st May at 10.30 am. This is to call for a stop to asylum seeker interviews by Embassy personnel. Contact: Ephraim Tapa 07940793090, Fungisai Mupandira 07758958803.

- **MDC UK & Ireland South West District Reading Branch Fundraising BBQ Party.** Saturday 1st

June. Theme: Mnangagwa release all political prisoners – Zanu PF must go. From 12.30 – 1.30 pm demonstration at Reading train station. Then from 2.30 – 11 pm gochi gochi, disco music, jumping castle. Venue: Pakistani Community Centre, Reading RG1 13PA. Free car parking available. Bus 17 from Reading train station. Contact: Deborah Harry: 07578894896, Charles Mararirakwenda: 07588275745 and Josephine Jombe: 07455166668.

- **ROHR general members' meeting.** Saturday 8th June from 11.30 am. Venue: Royal Festival Hall, South Bank Centre, Belvedere Road SE1 8XX. Contact: Ephraim Tapa 07940793090, Patricia Masamba 07708116625.

- **ROHR fundraising dinner.** Saturday 29th June from 6 pm till late. Venue: Zazas, 108 Whitechapel Road, London E1 1JE. Contact: Esther Munyira 07492058109, Fungisai Mupandira 07468504393, Siphon Ndlovu 07400566013, Patricia Masamba 07708116625, Simbarashe Jingo 07787870888, Pamela Chirimuta 07762737339, Sikhumbuzule Sibanda 07912210225, and Farai Muroiwa 07365431776.

- **ROHR sponsored walk.** Saturday 27th July. Contact: Esther Munyira 07492058109, Siphon Ndlovu 07400566013, Patricia Masamba and Farai Muroiwa 07365431776. More information as plans progress.

- **The Restoration of Human Rights in Zimbabwe (ROHR)** is the Vigil's partner organization based in Zimbabwe. ROHR grew out of the need for the Vigil to have an organization on the ground in Zimbabwe which reflected the Vigil's mission statement in a practical way. ROHR in the UK actively fundraises through membership subscriptions, events, sales etc to support the activities of ROHR in Zimbabwe. Please note that the official website of

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ROHR Zimbabwe is

<http://www.rohrzimbabwe.org/>

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. Any other website claiming to be the official website of ROHR in no way represents us.

- **The Vigil's book 'Zimbabwe Emergency'** is based on our weekly diaries. It records how events in Zimbabwe have unfolded as seen by the diaspora in the UK. It chronicles the economic disintegration, violence, growing oppression and political manoeuvring – and the tragic human cost involved. It is available at the Vigil. All proceeds go to the Vigil and our sister organisation the Restoration of Human Rights in Zimbabwe's work in Zimbabwe. The book is also available from Amazon.

- **Facebook pages:Vigil:** <https://www.facebook.com/zimbabwevigil> ROHR: <https://www.facebook.com/Restoration-of-Human-Rights-ROHR-Zimbabwe-International-370825706588551/>

ZAF:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Zimbabwe-Action-Forum-ZAF/490257051027515>

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