

THE FOOD CRISIS

Over a year ago, in October 2000, issue 7 of the *Human Rights Monitor* first looked at food as a fundamental human right. Then, bread cost \$23 for a standard white loaf – and people had rioted.

Things are worse now, in the “year of the ballooning bread price”. Our right to eat is even more threatened. We have an extreme food shortage. Production fell on occupied farms. Until September, farmers refused to sell maize to the GMB because its price (\$7 500 per tonne) was too low. The GMB then backdated its new price (Z\$8 500) to June. But by the end of the buying season, the GMB had reportedly bought only 48% of the maize it bought last year from farmers.

In August 2001 government recognised that a family of four needed Z\$4181.38 per month just to buy food. But Government itself pays destitute people on its public works programme only Z\$250 per month to buy food.

70% of people are unemployed. Inflation is nearly 100%. Government continues to print money and worsen inflation. A black market in basic foods is expected. In 2002, roller meal may cost Z\$20 000 per tonne.

The current food crisis

By October 2001, a white loaf cost \$66. Government then controlled the price at \$48,40. “War veterans” closed supermarkets to force them to sell at the official price. Bakers stopped producing. The Confederation of Zimbabwean Industries and the MDC warned that “Price controls will directly lead to shortages of the basic commodities, especially food, as companies stop production”. Why? Because food producers are being told to sell for less money than it costs them to produce.

The MDC slammed price control as a “senseless, illegal and irresponsible attack on the food system”. Government, it said, was running the economy “like a casino project”. The MDC prefers a system of subsidies specifically for poor consumers.

What is Zimbabwe’s food situation now, in November 2001? Let’s look at maize. Normally, when we can, we Zimbabweans eat 115 000 tonnes of mealie-meal each month.

On 22 August official stocks in the Strategic Grain Reserve were reported to be 259 000 tonnes.

By mid-October, the Grain Marketing Board was reported to have no maize stocks in Bulawayo, and it failed to pay farmers for half of the wheat they delivered. By January 2002, the Famine Early Warning Unit expects our maize stocks to be finished, unless more maize is imported. But by early November, government had not responded to the Grain Producers’ Association offer to guarantee delivery of 200 000 tonnes worth US\$32 million.

In August, 41 districts in all provinces had requested food aid for 2,14 million people. Now 2,58 million villagers – one-fifth of our total population – have registered for food relief: 836 420 in Matabeleland North, 540 000 in Matabeleland South, 700 000 in the Midlands and 500 000 in Masvingo. Half a million of these people were expected to be starving by Christmas. By October, some were already surviving on roots and grasses. The situation was especially critical in Chivi and Chiredzi, where 200 000 people had no food. The Zimbabwe Agricultural Welfare Trust warned of “a massive humanitarian disaster”, which included quarter of a million townspeople and at least 30 000 farmworkers.

In Matabeleland and the Midlands, six NGOs tried to raise Z\$200 million for food relief. Save the Children (UK) budgetted one million pounds to feed 81 000 people in Binga and Nyaminyami, “in conjunction with government”. In Lupane, “warlords and vigilante groups” were reported to have taken over food distribution with Zanu-PF’s blessing. Starving villagers who were not members of the ruling party were reported to have been denied food relief.

Government itself actually stopped NGOs such as Christian Care and the Red Cross from distributing food relief to starving people in Chivi and other places. Dzikimai Mavhaire, chairman of the Red Cross Society in Masvingo Province, said NGOs had to comply with government directives. “The volatile political situation”, he said, made Red Cross workers “afraid of going into rural areas to do their work because they risk being attacked by members of political parties”. Masvingo provincial governor Josaya Hungwe reportedly attacked the Red Cross for “acting as agents of the opposition”. He told them to channel their food aid through government.

Government did distribute Z\$80 million in cash to rural people in Masvingo province. Five Zanu-PF

rallies were held immediately afterwards. Although people reportedly ululated, you cannot eat cash when there is no food to buy.

How did this happen?

A year ago, the *Monitor* had predicted this shortage. Production and sales of fertiliser and hybrid seed had already dropped. The acreage under food crops had already fallen. The farm occupations had already disrupted production. Commercial producers on designated (and many undesignated) farms were not allowed to plant even when they wished to.

But other things happened later. The GMB did not *begin* paying farmers for their 1999-2000 crops until mid-November 2000. So farmers had no money to buy inputs in good time. Some major grain-producing areas were flooded late in the season. Ten thousand hectares of maize were washed out. Others had badly-distributed rainfall which cut yields.

The price of fuel again doubled and the value of the Zimdollar fell dramatically. So inputs cost more than small farmers could afford. Diesel was often unavailable for ploughing and other farm work. The DDF failed to plough for resettled farmers - it had no money, no diesel, and nearly 60% of its tractors were not working anyway.

In 2001, Zimbabwe's grain harvest fell by nearly 30%.

This season, small farmers have again had problems ploughing. DDF tractors have again not been available, fuel has again been short, and over half our peasant farmers have no oxen to plough with. By the start of the 2001-2 rains, almost no grain fields had even been ploughed, never mind planted. The area of food crops planted during the 2001-2 growing season is predicted to fall by nearly 60%.

Government allocated nearly 45% of its \$15 billion input credit to the Grain Marketing Board to plough and provide seed and fertiliser to resettled farmers. This has never before been the GMB's responsibility. In December *The Herald* reported the GMB was still waiting for Tender Board approval to order 7 000 tonnes of seed maize.

In mid-November, government extended its price controls to include fertiliser and seed (maize, groundnuts, soyabeans, beans, millet, sunflower). These controls reduced the prices by about 35%. But fertiliser and farming chemicals are made from imports. The exchange rate remained the same, and no forex was available at official rates. So agro-chemical companies faced serious losses, because the controlled prices were lower than their costs of production. They cannot survive in business like this. Little fertiliser and no pesticides mean that next year's harvests will be very low.

And hundreds of commercial farmers are being evicted from their designated land with 90 days notice in the middle of the 2001-2 growing season.

So the food position will be even worse next year.

Who is responsible?

In July the *Sunday Mail* alleged that the MDC was trying to create artificial food shortages by buying maize from peasant farmers and storing it in leased GBM silo space. It accused the MDC of buying up green maize still standing in the fields. As late as 28 August 2001, *The Herald* claimed that "Zimbabwe is not facing a food crisis at all. In fact, the country is far better off than most of its regional neighbours...".

Meanwhile the Famine Early Warning Unit gave the real position. We need to import 593 000 tonnes of maize, 150 000 tonnes of wheat, 62 000 tonnes of small grains (sorghum and millet) and 11 000 tonnes of rice. SADC reported that the Zimbabwean Government was making arrangements to import 544 225 tonnes of maize but had no forex to pay for it.

Still *The Herald* (7 November 2001) expected a "Bumper Crop" with "higher than projected wheat output" from its *own* report that the Cereal Producers' Association had projected *lower* output this year! And the *Sunday Mail* expected indigenous farmers to produce 4,8 million tonnes of maize in the 2001-2 season – more than double Zimbabwe's largest-ever crop!

It seems, then, that the official press was "not well acquainted with the truth".

While the official media misled the nation, Government was frantically making emergency plans. On 16 July the State re-controlled maize and wheat (SI 235A/2001) and re-established the GMB monopoly. "The objective was quite clear: to secure full control over grain so as to be able to use this as a means of patronage in meeting basic needs", noted the MDC's M Ngwenya. As prices were expected to rocket up, people speculated that "import licences will go only to a select few who are Zanu loyalists".

The GMB monopoly over buying and selling grain means that small hammer-mills and bakeries owned by black Zimbabweans are no longer allowed to deal informally in the grain market. They are going broke.

Who owns the farmers' maize and wheat?

In July, agriculture minister Joseph Made implied that the army would confiscate grain from anyone who refused to sell it to the GMB. By mid-October, the GMB said *all* maize and wheat produced *must* be delivered. *No farmers, large or small, were allowed to retain any grain to feed themselves, their workers or their livestock.* And one war veteran was reported as saying urban people must not be fed because they support opposition parties.

By October, in Shamva, many reports had come in that small peasant farmers had been forced by the army and/or war veterans to sell their *entire* output to the GMB, leaving their granaries completely empty.

On various bus routes serving Gokwe, Karoi and Chiweshe, hundreds of rural travellers had been stopped at roadblocks by the police. They were fined \$400 (without receipts) and either had their grain confiscated or were forced to offload it and sell it to the nearest GMB depot. The GMB itself admitted that it had confiscated 7 058 tonnes of wheat and 2 929 tonnes of maize, mainly from Mashonaland East and Central provinces.

This is the most blatant assault yet by our government on the fundamental rights of food producers to feed themselves from their own work and output. It is also the most basic human right of everyone to eat. The last time such a policy was implemented, by Joseph Stalin in the USSR in the 1930s, 26 million peasants were killed by hunger. Then, there was no Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Today there is. And today the International Court of Justice tries those who do not regard others as human and infringe their fundamental human rights.

Other foods

After the price controls were introduced, sugar and cooking oil, as well as bread and mealie meal, became scarce in supermarkets.

The Business Herald found that Harare butcheries were selling economy beef at up to \$200 per kg. The controlled price is \$124 per kg. Butcheries accused the Cold Storage Commission of raising their wholesale prices. The Cold Storage Commission said “few people are selling their cattle to us for slaughter because of the prices that we are offering. At the moment, we do not have any beef at all.”

What to do?

In July, a government task force on food security was set up. It involved five ministers and the GMB. It had **no** stakeholders outside government. Its brief was to recommend to Cabinet “necessary measures ... to ensure food security in the country”.

Presumably acting on the Task Force’s recommendations, Government prohibited food exports and budgetted to import only 100 000 tonnes of maize and 60 000 tonnes of wheat in its Z\$17,2 billion supplementary budget. The costs of these imports are likely to be met by the private sector.

On 24 September 2001, Cabinet approved a pre-planting price for the 2001-2 maize crop of Z\$15 000 per tonne, up 76%, “to give clear signals to farmers to substantially increase the hectareage under maize to ensure food security at both national and household level”. Farmers regarded this announcement as premature and unrealistic because of inflation. In 2001-2, commercially-farmed maize is expected to be planted on less than 40 000 ha compared to 68 000 ha this season. New wheat prices were raised up to 38% on the price announced in June 2001, with premiums and discounts for differing qualities.

In mid-November, government finally admitted it did not have enough food and needed Z\$11 billion to import grain. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) co-ordinated international donor efforts to supply us with 116 650 tonnes of grain worth US\$80 million through the World Food Programme. This food was to be distributed from December “through organisations with proven food aid experience in Zimbabwe [including] NGOs”. But government refused this condition. And it delayed so long awarding tenders to import that the US dollar price rose by 33% while it dilly-dallied.

Parliament approved a supplementary budget of Z\$2,568 billion for Social Welfare as “drought relief”. ***But the 2002 budget for “social protection” was cut 26% from Z\$3,4 billion in 2001 to Z\$2,5 billion in 2002, despite 100% inflation and the doubling of their budgets for most ministries.***

For how long will we eat? How many will starve?

Human Rights Generally

Our usual review of human rights’ violations now draws on unpublished as well as published sources. Despite fewer reports this month of human rights abuses, we mourn five people killed as a result of political violations and offer condolences to their families. They included two unnamed members of the MDC, together with:

Kufa RUKARA (MDC), abducted, tortured, who died a month later in hospital from his head injuries;

Cain NKALA, Bulawayo war veteran leader also abducted and later found buried in a shallow grave; and

Johannes Felix SIKELE, a resettled farmer shot in a struggle for a patrol guard’s gun.

1. Civil rights

In November 2001, there were only 10 published and no private reports of civil rights’ violations. All 10 reports came from urban areas. We are somewhat disturbed by what appears to be lack of media attention to civil rights this month. We hope this will not prove to be a trend.

Who were the victims of civil rights abuses?

As Table 1 shows, there were at least 112 individual abuses.

Among the individually-known victims were one boy and 11 men. In one case probably hundreds of adults of both sexes who work for the state media were threatened with retrenchment if they supported the opposition MDC.

Who violated civil rights?

We applaud **all** of the political parties for **not** being caught and reported in **any** of the civil violations in November 2001.

Private individuals were also apparently well-

behaved. One individual's dogs mauled a man to death, and we offer condolences to his family. However, humans themselves refrained from violating others' rights.

Regrettably, therefore, the State, mainly Home Affairs (3) and the police (5), was responsible for almost all the violations of citizens' civil rights.

Table 1: November 2001: Victims of reported civil rights violations, including those resulting from political violence.

Type of Violation	ordinary	political	total
unlawful killings: total	2	5	7
(by ZRP)	0	0	0
attempted killings	0	1	1
death penalty	0	0	0
death threats	0	3	3
public/political violence	1	13	14
unlawful arrest	2	5	7
assault by police / army	2	1	3
by Zanu-PF/ZNLWVA	0	101	101
by MDC	0	3	3
other	0	1	1
disappearance/kidnap	1	8	9
firearms offences: total	0	1	1
(by ZRP)	0	0	0
(by others)	0	(1)	(1)
political intimidation / victimisation	0	3	3
political discrimination	>100	0	>100
torture	2	14	16
child abuse	0	0	0
child sex abuse / rape	0	0	0
freedom of expression	2	2	4
property-related	0	55	55
Total victims	>112	216	>328

>means more than

2. Political rights

Judging from 39 news reports and 14 unpublished cases, political violence remained on an even keel in November 2001. There were five deaths as a result of political violence but only three death threats of a political nature. The proportion of cases involving political violence fell.

In November 2001, two-thirds of all political violations of human rights occurred in rural settings. The remaining third afflicted townspeople. Table 2

shows the provincial distribution of these 53 'political' cases.

Who were the victims of political violations?

Political violence remained a predominantly male activity. 57 named men were affected, compared to 4 female victims.

Table 2. Distribution of 'political' violations by province: November 2001.

Mashonaland Central	15	28,3%
Mashonaland East	11	20,8%
Mashonaland West	8	15,1%
Bulawayo	7	13,2%
Harare	4	7,5%
Midlands	4	7,5%
Matabeleland North	3	5,7%
Masvingo	1	1,9%
Matabeleland South	0	0%
Manicaland	0	0%

Who violated political rights?

State agents were responsible for two incidents involving scores of victims, as the CIO, police and army attempted to remove squatters. Zanu-PF and war veterans, alone or together, were responsible for 41 incidents with 97 victims. MDC supporters victimised five people in four incidents.

As usual we would like you to let us know about human rights abuses. Please include your full name and address if you want us to answer, otherwise we will not know who to address and send replies to. (Our address is below.)

With the aim of developing a strong human rights culture in Zimbabwe, we want to know about and expose especially those human rights abuses that are not reported in the press. Information regarding unlawful killings, assaults, torture and other gross violations of Zimbabweans' civil rights is appreciated. But we also want to know when people cannot get birth certificates or identity documents, when property rights and work entitlements are violated, and when nothing is done about people who do not have access to health services and schooling.

The Legal Unit of the Human Rights NGO Forum offers legal advice and Amani Trust offers psychological counselling to anyone who has suffered from torture or organised (including political) violence. Address 1 Raleigh Street (off Rotten Row), Harare (tel. 792222, 737509, 731660; fax 772860; email admin@hrforum.co.zw).

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