

## AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

### Zimbabwe Monthly Briefing September 2020

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#### Zimbabwe Summary 10 September 2020

*The Zimbabwe government announces that certain foreign white farmers whose land was seized as part of the controversial land redistribution programme during the administration of former President Robert Mugabe (1987-2017) will be able to apply for restitution. South Africa sends two high-ranking diplomatic delegations to help resolve the political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe. The High Court in Harare grants prominent investigative journalist Hopewell Chin'ono bail after he spent over a month in jail on charges of inciting violence. The government bans mining in Hwange National Park, impacting the plans of two Chinese coal mining companies.*

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#### Restitution of commercial farmland to foreign white farmers ruffles feathers ...

The **Zimbabwe** government announced on 31 August that foreign white farmers settled in Zimbabwe whose land was seized under the regime of former president **Robert Mugabe** (1987-2017) two decades ago, can apply to have their land returned.<sup>1</sup> Zimbabwe has moved ahead with honouring **Bilateral Trade Agreements** in farming, committing to compensating at least 200 farmers from **European** countries such as **Germany, The Netherlands** and **Denmark**.<sup>2</sup> Former farm owners who are indigenous to Zimbabwe or citizens of countries protected under the **Bilateral Investment Promotion Protection Agreements (BIPPA)** are eligible to apply for restitution.<sup>3</sup> Successful applicants will either have their land restored to them or receive full compensation for agricultural land acquired and investments made on the farm if restitution is impractical.

*"Where the situation presently obtaining on the ground makes it impractical to restore land in this category to its former owners, government will offer the former farm owners alternative land elsewhere as restitution where such land is available."<sup>4</sup>*

Information ministry secretary and government spokesman **Nick Mangwana** clarified in a **Tweet** that the offer did not apply to all evicted white farmers, but to a select 37 foreign farmers who qualify for the special protection.<sup>5</sup>

The government's decision is guided by Section 295(1) of the constitution, which was passed during the short-lived government of national unity between the ruling **Zimbabwe African National Unity-Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF)** and the main opposition **Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)** in 2013.<sup>6</sup> The relevant section states that foreign white farmers protected by treaties between their governments and Zimbabwe should be compensated for land and other assets. However, removing black Zimbabwean beneficiaries from land seized from white farmers proved to be both impractical and politically challenging.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Al Jazeera, 1 Sep 2020

<sup>2</sup> The Independent, 4 Sep 2020

<sup>3</sup> The Herald, 5 Sep 2020

<sup>4</sup> The Herald, 5 Sep 2020

<sup>5</sup> The Herald, 5 Sep 2020

<sup>6</sup> The Independent, 4 Sep 2020

<sup>7</sup> Source, Zimbabwe analyst

Finance minister **Mthuli Ncube** and lands and agriculture minister **Anxious Masuka** released a joint statement encouraging other white farmers, whose land is earmarked for acquisition by the government but who are still on their property, to apply for 99-year leases, like their black Zimbabwean counterparts.<sup>8</sup>

The land reform programme continues to divide opinion in Zimbabwe, where the number of white farmers dropped from 4,500 to about 200 when the land reforms began 20 years ago. Opponents view the land reforms as a partisan process that left the country struggling to feed itself and say the process of reversing the policy is *"too little, too late"*. However, land reform supporters say the programme has empowered landless black people to own arable land, despite the economic hardship now facing the country.<sup>9</sup> Zimbabwe's war veterans have denounced the latest agreement to restore land to some white farmers and threatened to sue the government.<sup>10</sup> Alongside government ministers, senior officials and politically connected elites, the war veterans have much to lose, having benefited the most from the seizure of commercial farmland. In a letter to President **Emmerson Mnangagwa** (2017-present) dated 31 August, the war veterans described the move as *"highly discriminatory, degrading and paramount to rejecting the liberation movement"*.<sup>11</sup> However, the predominantly white **Commercial Farmers Union (CFU)** welcomed the government's decision, with CFU leader **Andrew Pascoe** calling it *"a miracle"*.<sup>12</sup>

Zimbabwe's ailing economy appears to be the motivation for the change in approach to the land issue, with Mnangagwa desperate to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) and change Zimbabwe's image in the international community.<sup>13</sup> However, the international community is more concerned about current human rights abuses, stifling of dissent, rampant corruption and lack of political freedom.<sup>14</sup> Few western governments have the political will to engage and address the issues in Zimbabwe, especially during a global pandemic.<sup>15</sup> **European Union (EU)** ambassador to Zimbabwe **Tim Olkkonen** stated on 6 September that the EU would not allow taxpayers' money to be *"squandered and unaccounted for in Zimbabwe"*.<sup>16</sup> The government's shift in approach to land may thus not have its desired effect.

### ... as South Africa sends high-ranking delegations to Zimbabwe

South Africa's ruling **African National Congress (ANC)** party sent a second high-ranking delegation to Zimbabwe on 9 September in an attempt to resolve and mediate an end to Zimbabwe's escalating economic and political turmoil.<sup>17</sup> The delegation, led by ANC secretary-general **Ace Magashule**, met leaders of Zanu-PF, but not members of Zimbabwe's opposition. However, Zanu-PF agreed that the delegation could meet with the opposition on its next visit.

An earlier ANC delegation in August met with high-level resistance and failed to reach any meaningful resolution.<sup>18</sup> President Mnangagwa denied there was a crisis and said there was *"nothing to discuss"*. Zanu-PF reiterated Mnangagwa's position on 7 September, saying it was not willing to engage as the visit was motivated *"on the pretence that the country is in crisis"*.<sup>19</sup> Zanu-

<sup>8</sup> The Independent 4 Sep 2020

<sup>9</sup> Source, analyst, Cape Town

<sup>10</sup> BBC, 4 Sep 2020

<sup>11</sup> BBC, 4 Sep 2020

<sup>12</sup> BBC, 4 Sep 2020

<sup>13</sup> Source, Zimbabwe analyst, Cape Town

<sup>14</sup> Source Analyst Cape Town

<sup>15</sup> Source Analyst Cape Town

<sup>16</sup> Times Live, 6 Sep 2020

<sup>17</sup> Bloomberg, 9 Sep 2020

<sup>18</sup> Daily Maverick 9 Sep 2020

<sup>19</sup> News 24, 7 Sep 2020

PF also barred the ANC delegation from meeting opposition parties and NGOs.<sup>20</sup>

Zanu-PF holds the ANC in high regard as a neighbour and a former liberation party, and an organisation that has been willing to lobby for the lifting of sanctions on Zimbabwe.<sup>21</sup> In a press conference following the 9 September meeting, Magashule stated that the ANC delegation was there “to listen and not to tell another former Liberation Party what to do”:

*“We felt that together with Zanu-PF, indeed there is no problem in meeting with the [opposition] structures. Therefore, we are going to make arrangements to once more come back and meet these organisations.”<sup>22</sup>*

South Africa’s President **Cyril Ramaphosa** (2018-present) has reassured Zimbabwe that his country is prepared to help politically and economically but “Zimbabwe needs to accept the help”. Zimbabwe is facing a shortage of medicine, food and water, with a collapsed currency and annual inflation at 837%.<sup>23</sup> Aid agencies estimate that 60% of Zimbabweans will need help finding food by April 2021.<sup>24</sup> The economic crisis has forced up to two million undocumented Zimbabweans to enter South Africa<sup>25</sup>, adding to the large pool of unemployed South Africans, which has led to violent xenophobic attacks.<sup>26</sup>

The ANC meeting is a step in the right direction as it may allow for the “quiet diplomacy” of the past.<sup>27</sup> South Africa last intervened in Zimbabwe in 2008, when then President **Thabo Mbeki** (1999-2008) brokered a deal to force Zanu-PF into a government of national unity with the MDC. The two parties shared power in a troubled coalition until 2013, when Zanu-PF secured the majority of votes in an election the MDC claimed was flawed.<sup>28</sup>

### Zimbabwe journalist Hopewell Chin’ono released on bail

The **High Court in Harare** has granted bail to prominent Zimbabwean investigative journalist **Hopewell Chin’ono** after police arrested and detained him on 20 July (see *ARC Briefing Zimbabwe August 2020*).<sup>29</sup> Chin’ono was denied bail three times following his arrest on charges of inciting violence after he encouraged people to join a planned anti-government protest during the **Covid-19** pandemic. Chin’ono had recently collaborated with fellow journalist **Mduduzi Mathuthi** on an exposé on alleged Covid-19 corruption before his arrest.<sup>30</sup>

However, human rights lawyer **Doug Coltart** has argued that the bail conditions are unconstitutional and infringe on Chin’ono’s rights. One of the bail conditions is that Chin’ono cannot use social media platform **Twitter** to incite mass demonstrations. Chin’ono stated,

*“Our role as journalists is to bring power to account; they have barred me from Twitter, but they have not barred me from **Facebook**. I will continue to write on Facebook and local media.”<sup>31</sup>*

Ironically, when President Mnangagwa came to power in 2017 through a coup d’état and displaced Mugabe, Chin’ono was amongst those who posted on social media that Mnangagwa

<sup>20</sup> News 24, 9 Sep 2020

<sup>21</sup> Source, analyst, Cape Town

<sup>22</sup> Times Live, 9 Sep 2020

<sup>23</sup> Bloomberg, 8 Sep 2020

<sup>24</sup> Bloomberg, 8 Sep 2020

<sup>25</sup> Africa Check, 2019

<sup>26</sup> ARC analyst

<sup>27</sup> Source Analyst, Cape Town

<sup>28</sup> BBC, 9 Sep 2020

<sup>29</sup> News 24, 2 Sep 2020

<sup>30</sup> Daily Maverick, 3 Sep 2020

<sup>31</sup> News 24, 2 Sep 2020

should be given a chance to turn things around.<sup>32</sup> After assuming power, Mnangagwa promised to implement democratic ideals and media reforms.<sup>33</sup> However, the arrest of Chin'ono and other human rights defenders and political activists has placed the Zimbabwe government under international scrutiny over alleged human rights abuses.

Coming out of prison, Chin'ono described how his incarceration highlighted for him the extent of Zimbabwe's problems:

*"My experience in prison showed that many prisoners are suffering; there is no food or adequate blankets and the cells are overcrowded. My detention confirmed what we have always written about as journalists, that there is massive corruption in the country and inmates would not be surviving like that if national resources were being put to good use."*<sup>34</sup>

### Zimbabwe bans coal mining in Hwange National Park

Information minister **Monica Mutsvangwa** announced on 9 September a ban on all mining in Zimbabwe's national parks with immediate effect.<sup>35</sup> The ban reverses a decision to allow two **Chinese** firms to drill for coal in **Hwange National Park**, home to 40,000 elephants and numerous other species, including the endangered black rhino. The **Zimbabwe Environment Lawyers Association (ZELA)** took the government to court to prevent ecological degradation in the parks after the government had permitted **AfroChine Energy Zimbabwe** and **Zimbabwe Zhongxin Coal Mining Group** to explore for coal.<sup>36</sup> The state mining arm, **Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation**, held the Hwange concession but partnered with the two Chinese firms.<sup>37</sup>

ZELA claimed that once exploration for coal commences, the park will be reduced to a site for drilling, land clearance, road construction and geological surveys.<sup>38</sup> Following a government cabinet meeting, Mutsvangwa also announced the banning of mining along most riverbeds, in a move that will affect small-scale Chinese and local gold miners.<sup>39</sup> China is a close ally of the Zimbabwe government and a major investor in Zimbabwe's economy. Zimbabwe has adopted a policy of 'Looking East' to boost its struggling economy after Western governments imposed sanctions in response to the government's poor human rights record. Zimbabwe's willingness to grant exploration rights in the nature reserve indicates the power and influence that **Beijing** wields in Zimbabwe. However, both governments are aware of the sensitivity surrounding conservation and the decision is unlikely to affect relations between Beijing and Harare.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Source, analyst, Cape Town

<sup>33</sup> Daily Maverick, 3 Sep 2020

<sup>34</sup> The Zimbabwean Independent, 3 Sep 2020

<sup>35</sup> BBC, 9 Sep 2020

<sup>36</sup> Reuters, 9 Sep 2020

<sup>37</sup> Miningmx, 9 Sep 2020

<sup>38</sup> BBC, 9 Sep 2020

<sup>39</sup> Miningmx, 9 Sep 2020

<sup>40</sup> Source, analyst, Cape Town

## Planner

June 2023 **(Zimbabwe)** General elections

## Chronology

9 Sep 2020 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *IOL*. **Zimbabwe** resumes domestic flights in a bid to boost tourism and will reintroduce international travel in October, requiring travelers to have **Covid-19** clearance certificates;

8 Sep 2020 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *News24*. **South Africa's** ruling **African National Congress (ANC)** party sends a high- ranking diplomatic envoy headed by ANC secretary general **Ace Magashule** to help resolve the political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe;

8 Sep 2020 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *The Herald*. Zimbabwe relaxes **Covid-19** restrictions to allow returnees who have tested negative for **Covid-19** within 48 hours of arrival to self-quarantine;

8 Sep 2020 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *Miningmx*. The government grants **Chinese** companies permission to drill for coal in flagship wildlife conservation area **Hwange National Park**, home to one of the largest populations of elephants in **Africa**;

7 Sep 2020 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *NewZimbabwe*. Finance minister **Mthuli Ncube** says Zimbabwe's economy has contracted as a result of the **Covid-19** pandemic, but is not the worst affected country in **Africa**;

6 Sep 2020 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *The Herald*. **European Union (EU)** ambassador to **Zimbabwe**, **Timo Olkkonen**, says the EU will not reinstate direct budgetary support to Zimbabwe because of its opaque financial management systems;

6 Sep 2020 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *Sunday Mail*. **Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA)** chairperson **Christopher Mutsvangwa** says the organisation strongly supports the initiative to return land as a gesture of "goodwill";

2 Sep 2020 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *BBC*. Zimbabwe journalist **Hopewell Chin'ono** and opposition politician **Jacob Ngarivhumeis** are released on bail after being in prison since July on charges of inciting public violence for posting messages on social media supporting a protest against corruption;

2 Sep 2020 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *BBC*. The government announces that schools will reopen in two weeks, leaving time for appropriate measures to be put in place;

1 Sep 2020 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *Al Jazeera*. The government announces that foreign white farmers can apply for return of seized land that is protected by international investment treaties;

27 Aug 2020 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *BBC*. **United Kingdom (UK)** ambassador to **Zimbabwe**, **Melanie Robinson**, expresses serious concerns over the human rights situation in Zimbabwe, following the arrest of activists and opposition politicians;

22 Aug 2020 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *Al Jazeera*. Opposition **Movement for Democratic Change-Alliance (MDC-Alliance)** vice chairperson **Job Sikhala** is arrested after going into hiding in July after appearing on a police wanted list;

16 Aug 2020 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *Al Jazeera*. The government denounces accusations by the **Zimbabwe Catholic Bishop's Conference** of rampant corruption and that it is carrying out human rights abuses and cracking down on dissent, as "*evil and baseless*";

11 Aug 2020 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *BBC*. An envoy sent by **South Africa's** President **Cyril Ramaphosa** in response to the crisis in the neighbouring Zimbabwe cancels the group's meeting with the main opposition **MDC Alliance**;

10 Aug 2020 **Harare (Zimbabwe) BBC**. Main opposition party **MDC Alliance** says about 30 party members have fled their homes in fear of being abducted by government forces as the government continues its crackdown on anti-government protests.

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