

**Statement by
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Bureau of African Affairs
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before the**

**U.S. House Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee on Africa, Global Health, Global
Human Rights, and International Organizations**

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Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for holding this hearing on Zimbabwe and for inviting me to testify before you. We appreciate the deep interest of this Committee and are pleased to work closely with Congress in support of our national interests in Zimbabwe and the region. Last month, traveling with my counterpart from the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, I went to Zimbabwe to engage in a series of meetings with our embassy, the government, opposition members, and civil society. The purpose of the trip was to reaffirm U.S. messages of support for the people of Zimbabwe, to communicate our hopes for democratic reforms and economic development, and to better understand the situation on the ground.

Fundamentally, Zimbabwe remains trapped in a moment in time that has been unfolding for decades. President Robert Mugabe maintains his hold on power, as a result of the 2013 elections that were neither free nor fair. The country's economy is failing, driven down not by international sanctions but by national policies and rampant unemployment. Once a breadbasket for the region, it faces major food security challenges in the months to come. Political rights remain curtailed. Outright violence has declined compared to previous years, but prominent examples, such as the disappearance of activist Itai Dzamara, remind Zimbabweans that their safety is elusive. Both the ruling party and the opposition appear to be fragmenting, adding to an environment of uncertainty and therefore unease.

Against this backdrop, U.S. interests in Zimbabwe remain the same: a peaceful, democratic, and prosperous Zimbabwe that provides for its people and contributes to regional stability. To realize our interests, we strongly believe in engagement with government and non-government alike to promote our values and work together in areas of common concern. We view this ongoing dialogue as part

of building the bilateral relationship. Current circumstances do not merit a change in our policy, but we remain hopeful that in the future they will. We strive to balance our targeted sanctions on those who have impinged upon human rights and the rule of law with our encouragement of economic reforms and investment. We stand by the commitments we made to the people of Zimbabwe at their independence in 1980 to work together to promote democratic institutions, equitable economic growth, public health, and food security. To this end, the United States has provided over \$2.6 billion in development assistance to Zimbabwe since its independence.

Zimbabwe's economy, as I noted, is failing. While the country had made headway in curbing hyperinflation during the period of the Government of National Unity, between 2008 and 2013, today the economy is again in desperate straits. The civil service wage bill alone eats up an unsustainable 80 percent of total expenditures, leaving very little in the budget to run government operations or support investment in the country's degraded infrastructure. The formal economy has shrunk to a small fraction of Zimbabwe's citizens: unemployment estimates range as high as 80 percent or even higher. To add to the country's woes, poor rains, building on disastrous agricultural policies in past years, are projected to leave millions of Zimbabweans facing food insecurity.

The government of Zimbabwe continues to blame U.S. targeted sanctions for its economic hardship but in reality these bleak conditions were created by the government itself. The World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index rates Zimbabwe as 171st out of 189 countries in the world. Transparency International also places them in the bottom twenty on its Corruption Perceptions Index. Other barriers to international investment include a lack of clarity about indigenization policies, failures to safeguard property rights, and the uneven application of the rule of law.

Political developments and uncertainties are exacerbating economic problems. Internal struggles over possible succession within ZANU-PF, the ruling party, continue to dominate political discourse and impede any hopes for reform. In December 2014, President Mugabe dismissed one of his vice presidents, Joice Mujuru, long thought to be a favorite to succeed him. This was followed by a series of cabinet shuffles and party expulsions of her perceived supporters. Within the party, factions are forming as potential successors vie for positions of power. In the meantime, at 91, President Mugabe remains firmly in charge and there are no indications he plans to step down.

Zimbabwe's opposition has failed to capitalize on the fissures in ZANU-PF and unite behind a common vision. The opposition has become increasingly splintered itself, with new, breakaway parties forming under other leadership. This political fracturing underlines the importance of the United States standing firmly on democratic principles, rule of law, and human rights, and encouraging the government and opposition alike to make progress in those areas.

The United States places the protection of human rights at the center of our foreign policy and has long-standing concerns about violations of human rights, including intimidation, harassment, and torture. The United States remains gravely concerned about reports of the forced disappearance of Zimbabwean civil society activist Itai Dzamara on March 9. To date, his whereabouts and well-being remain unknown. Mr. Dzamara gained notoriety after he presented a letter to the Office of the President and Cabinet in 2014 demanding that President Mugabe step down for failing the Zimbabwean people. During our recent visit to Zimbabwe, my colleague and I raised this case with the government and in virtually every meeting. The United States stands with Mr. Dzamara and the people of Zimbabwe in defending the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

For all its challenges – and their numbers are legion – I was struck once again by the resilience and tremendous capacities of the Zimbabwean people. As one gentleman told me, “There is nothing in this country that is not fixable.” The United States shares that conviction and that hope. When I was in Harare last month, several people asked me if Americans still cared about what was happening in Zimbabwe. Hearings such as this are proof that, in fact, we do.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to speak with your Committee today. I welcome any questions you may have.