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BUILDING A SAFE, JUST AND TOLERANT SOCIETY

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1. Introduction

1.01 This Country of Origin Information Bulletin (COI Bulletin) has been produced by Research Development and Statistics (RDS), Home Office, from information about Zimbabwe obtained from a wide variety of recognised sources. It does not contain any Home Office opinion or policy.

1.02 This COI Bulletin has been prepared for background purposes for those involved in the asylum/human rights determination process. The information it contains is not exhaustive. It concentrates on the issues most commonly raised in asylum/ human rights claims made in the United Kingdom.

1.03 The COI Bulletin is sourced throughout. It is intended to be used by caseworkers as a signpost to the source material, which has been made available to them. The vast majority of the source material is readily available in the public domain.

1.04 This COI Bulletin is intended to cover major developments that have taken place in Zimbabwe since publication of the Zimbabwe Country of Origin Information Report (COI Report) in October 2005 and must be read in conjunction with that. The COI Bulletin is intended to give a brief overview of the internal problems affecting Zimbabwe's main opposition party – the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The COI Bulletin only includes reports considered to be relevant to those involved in the asylum/human rights determination process.

1.05 This COI Bulletin and the accompanying source material are publicly disclosable. Where sources identified in the COI Bulletin are available in electronic form the relevant link has been included. The date that the relevant link was accessed in preparing the COI Bulletin is also included. Paper copies of the sources have been distributed to nominated officers in Asylum Caseworking Directorate and all Presenting Officer Units.

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2. The cracks appear

2.01 On 17 August 2005, the International Crisis Group noted that the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) was facing internal difficulties following its third national election defeat. The report noted that the party had become preoccupied with the question of leadership and policy strategies in the wake of defeat in March 2005 parliamentary elections. **[10b] (executive summary)**

2.02 On 24 July 2005, the Sunday Mirror quoted a source at the MDC who noted that "Everyone knows that there are divisions in the party's top leadership over the manner in which Tsvangirai has led the MDC to three successive electoral defeats." The article reported "Following revelations that opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai was to carry out a purge of party big-wigs, it has come to light that MDC secretary-general Welshman Ncube is mulling quitting the party, with an option of either going it alone henceforth or becoming part of the much talked about 'Third Force'." **[11b]**

2.03 Following ZANU-PF's election victory in the March 2005 parliamentary elections, tension within the main opposition MDC began to show itself as the Sunday Mirror reported (7 August 2005) that the MDC was showing signs of division over how Mugabe's election win should be challenged. The Sunday Mirror reported that party leader – Morgan Tsvangirai, and party secretary general – Welshman Ncube, were openly contradicting one another on how the aftermath of the election should be handled. Ncube, who is keen for the MDC to continue challenging the legitimacy of ZANU-PF's election victory, is at odds with Tsvangirai who stated that he accepted President Mugabe was the legitimate Head of State. **[11a]**

2.04 The International Crisis Group's (ICG) report of 7 June 2005 noted that growing criticism of Morgan Tsangirai's leadership centred upon claims that he had failed to give clear direction after the disputed poll result. However, the report noted that the leadership feared that efforts to conduct mass protests would be met with overwhelming force from the security services. **[10a] (p12)** The ICG report noted that Tsvangirai's credibility had been damaged by his inertia following the elections, with many supporters feeling that the party has lost its willingness to confront the government. **[10a] (p13)**

2.05 Zimbabwe Updates, reporting an article published by the Daily Mirror on 12 July 2005, noted that former MDC MP, Roy Bennett, complained that the party had been hijacked by corrupt opportunists who were driven mainly by personal greed. "Bennett said he and a growing number of MDC supporters were frustrated by the party's lack of aggression towards the government." He said although Tsvangirai was a good leader, he had surrounded himself with a group of opportunists. "Bennett's comments come amid criticism the MDC failed to capitalise on 'Operation Murambatsvina/Restore Order' to rally Zimbabweans." **[13b]**

2.06 Noting the growing criticism of Morgan Tsvangirai, the ICG's 17 August report noted that many within the party believed that Morgan Tsvangirai had devoted more attention to internal disputes than to addressing the problems unleashed by ZANU-PF. The report also noted that a number of important donors were withholding or reducing financial support out of dissatisfaction with the party's course. **[10b] (p10)**

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3. Internal dissent

3.01 The Voice of America (VOA) in an article published on 4 November 2005 noted that the current crisis within the MDC came to a head over the question of whether or not the party should participate in senate elections scheduled to be held on 26 November. "Mr Tsvangirai wanted a boycott and has campaigned actively against participation." **[3a]** The BBC noted on 27 October 2005 that "The other five of the party's six top officials, led by secretary general Welshman Ncube, want to participate – and 26 party members have gone ahead and registered their candidacy." **[4a]**

3.02 In the run up to the MDC's vote on the issue, the VOC (10 October 2005) noted the growing split in the MDC between the pro and anti-senate camps. It noted that "MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai has repeatedly said the party should not take part in, what he says, will be another flawed election. He says money spent on staging the poll could be better spent on the civil service and food for the poor." **[3b]** Morgan Tsvangirai's position may be explained by a document published by Chatham House on 20 April 2005 that noted that South African President Thabo Mbeki had convinced Tsvangirai to participate in the March 2005 Zimbabwe parliamentary elections. "In retrospect, this is now believed to have been a tactical error, as his participation can be seen within Zimbabwe as legitimising the elections." **[14]** However, the VOC noted that the opposing camp within the MDC believes that the party should not allow ZANU-PF to gain a foothold in traditional MDC areas. **[3b]**

3.03 ZimOnline reported on 4 November 2005 that "Divisions in the MDC that insiders say had simmered over the last three years broke into the open last month when Tsvangirai refused to accept a narrow vote by the party council to take part in a November 26 election for a new senate that political analysts say will be used by President Robert Mugabe to extend his patronage network." **[7c]** The Financial Gazette (20 October 2005) noted that "The party's national council last week voted 33 for and 31 against participating in the elections, but Tsvangirai said the party had voted 50-50 and he had cast his vote against participation in what party officials say is a sham." **[8]** ZimOnline noted on 21 October 2005 that "The MDC leader is backed in his position by the party's key youth and women's wings." **[7b]**

3.04 The Financial Gazette noted on the 26 October 2005 that Morgan Tsvangirai believes the pro-senate position taken by some of his colleagues has been hijacked by state security agents for the purpose of exaggerating divisions within the party. The article noted that a lot of what is happening is believed to be a direct result of CIO involvement. **[2]** The BBC noted on the 27 October 2005 that "The Tsvangirai camp maintains that the Central Intelligence Organisation is actively supporting the electoral ambitions of the 26 candidates (the 26 candidates that have defied Morgan Tsvangirai's ruling). 'What is particularly worrying is the information we received indicating that some of these candidates were brought into the city by the CIO and driven to the nomination court a few minutes before 4pm yesterday (Monday, the nomination deadline),' Last Maengahama, MDC secretary for Harare province, said in a statement." **[4a]**

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3.05 ZimOnline reported on 21 October 2005 that the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) had infiltrated the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The article noted that "Intelligence minister Didymus Mutasa has said state secret agents are working hard to manipulate divisions rocking Zimbabwe's main opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party to accelerate its collapse, ZimOnline has learnt… Sources who attended the meeting said Mutasa described bitter wrangling in the MDC over whether the party should contest the senate election as a godsend that the state's spy Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) had to exploit to the full. 'My boys (CIO spies) are on it big time. This is a God-given opportunity and if we fail to destroy them (MDC) this time, then we might never ever get another chance like this. My ministry will not miss this opportunity,' a source quoted Mutasa as having told his colleagues. According to sources, Mutasa did not give details of what state intelligence operatives were doing to fuel division in the MDC but said he only indicated that huge resources including large quantities of money had been set aside to be used to infiltrate the opposition party and buy off some of its feuding senior leaders." **[7b]**

3.06 BBC News reported on 13 November 2005 that "Zimbabwe's opposition Movement for Democratic Change says it has expelled 26 members for defying its leader's boycott of the forthcoming election." The BBC's Africa editor claimed that the expulsion takes the MDC a step closer to a final split. **[4b]**

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4. Factional violence

4.01 Zimbabwe Updates reporting an article published by New Zimbabwe on 26 July 2005 noted that 'MDC fights for survival as splits widen.' The article reported that Frank Chamunorwa, a founding member of the MDC, was attacked by Morgan Tsvangirai loyalists. "The assault happened because Mr Chamunorwa was suspected of plotting against Morgan Tsvangirai, the MDC leader. Senior party figures have accused Welshman Ncube, the secretary general of planning to oust his leader and seize control of the party – a charge he has denied." However, "Discontent with Mr Tsvangirai's leadership is coming increasingly to the surface as the MDC fails to make any headway against the regime. When Mr Mugabe carried out his assault on the townships, bulldozing the homes or livelihoods of 700,000 people, the opposition failed to offer any coherent response. The MDC was paralysed by factional warfare and incapable of opposing Mr Mugabe." A number of other reports of intra-MDC violence have been reported including serious assaults. The report also noted an article published in The Telegraph, written by David Coltart, the MDC's legal secretary. Mr Coltart stated that the party appears to be intent on tearing up everything we have worked so hard to build up over the last few, very difficult years. Mr Coltard went on to claim that Mr Tsvangirai had acted inappropriately and against party rules when he failed to establish a formal disciplinary committee to look at a case against 20 junior members who had savagely attacked another MDC activist. **[13a]**

4.02 The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum on 19 August 2005 echoed the above report noting "A disturbing phenomenon in May was the MDC intra-party political violence. In this debacle, many youths were reported to have been

assaulted at Harvest House for allegedly not supporting the current MDC Secretary General, Professor Welshman Ncube, while in Kuwadzana a lady was allegedly assaulted for supporting him." **[12] (introduction)**

4.03 Reuters reporting an IRIN article on the 27 October 2005 noted that "The rift in the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) over participating in next month's senate election has degenerated into violence, according to the official Herald newspaper. It reported that five men loyal to MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai had appeared in court on Wednesday for allegedly attacking three senate candidates who defied Tsvangirai's order to boycott the poll." The report went on to note that "John Makumbe, a senior political science lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe, told IRIN that Tsvangirai and his supporters, including the youth and women's wings of the party could result in a 'very contradictory situation that's going to be quite confusing (for MDC supporters)… the potential for violence is everywhere,' he warned." **[1]** The previous day the Financial Gazette noted on the 26 October 2005 that Gibson Sibanda (Morgan Tsvangirai's deputy) accused Tsvangirai of complicity in acts of violence perpetrated on some party members over internal differences. **[2]**

4.04 The report by the Voice of America (VOA) published on 4 November 2005 noted that MDC Deputy Secretary General, Gift Chamanikire accused Morgan Tsvangirai of doing nothing to stop violence and intimidation within the party. The report went on to note that "Over the course of the year, some of the violence and intimidation within the MDC were revealed, party officials disagree how extensive the violence is within the party. It was a closely guarded secret that several top leaders did not go to work at the party's headquarters for weeks because they say they feared attack by gangs of MDC youth loyal to Mr Tsvangirai." **[3a]**

4.05 Reuters (quoting an article published by IRIN) on the 27 October 2005, noted that "The pro-senate faction has made allegations of intimidation in the battle for control of MDC offices around the country… Pro-election MDC spokesman Paul Themba Nyathi said: 'There is an unfortunate culture of violence emerging in the MDC. I have been informed that some rowdy youths were denouncing us, threatening us with death for disagreeing with Tsvangirai. Those that have not been to the party offices are afraid of being beaten up by some extremist elements in the MDC'." **[1]**

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5. The ethnic angle

5.01 The Minorities at Risk database (updated 31 December 2003) notes that "The Ndebele of Zimbabwe are concentrated in Western Zimbabwe in Matabeleland and live apart from other ethnic groups." **[5]** The Zimbabwe Information Centre states that Matabeleland is the political powerbase of the MDC. **[6]**

5.02 Summing up the origins of the MDC, the BBC noted on 27 October 2005 that "The Movement for Democratic Change [MDC] was always going to be a broad church. From its foundation in 1999, it has brought together city workers and farm labourers, small business and big landowners, Zimbabwe's Shona majority and the Ndebele minority, as well as a small number of white Zimbabweans." Commenting upon the ethnic divisions within the MDC, the BBC noted "Some

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commentators speak of an ethnic split – and it is true that Mr Tsvangirai is from the majority Shona ethnic group, and his five most prominent opponents within the party are from the Ndebele minority." **[4a]**

5.03 ZimOnline reported on 1 November 2005 that "The dispute between the two factions of the MDC has also assumed an ethnic dimension with support for Tsvangirai's position strong among regions dominated by the Shona ethnic group to which he belongs while (Welshman) Ncube, an Ndebele, is solidly backed in south-western regions populated by his Ndebele tribe." **[7a]** The Financial Gazette noted on 20 October 2005 that should rebel MDC candidates stand in the forthcoming Senate elections, Tsvangirai's position and standing in the party would be seriously compromised. However, on the question of a possible replacement for Tsvangirai, the Gazette noted that the inner group of senior party officials (all Ndebele) were aware that any potential leader could not come from Matabeleland (from their ranks) if the MDC wished to maintain its national identity and appeal. **[8]**

5.04 On 7 June 2005, the International Crisis Group had noted that "Despite the fact that he (Welshman Ncube) has increasingly emerged in the eyes of many as a credible leader, Ncube personally still faces an uphill task to build a national base of grassroots support. Some commentators suggest this is linked to his status as a minority Ndebele." **[10a] (p.13)**

5.05 allAfrica.com (reporting a Herald article dated 4 November 2005) noted the ethnic split, stating "It is also unfortunate that a major ethnic dimension has characterised the MDC split. Mr Tsvangirai's MDC draws its support mainly from constituencies in Harare. Apart from executive members in the Mashonaland provinces, it has no grassroots support to talk about in these Zanu-PF dominated constituencies. On the other hand, the other MDC, now effectively being led by Welshman Ncube, is consistently dominant in Bulawayo, Matabeleland North and South provinces." **[9]**

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