



## MUGABE ROW ENDANGERS EU-AFRICA SUMMIT

**African leaders dig their heels in and demand that the Zimbabwean leader should be allowed to appear in person.**

**By Joseph Sithole in Harare**

Plans for a European Union-Africa summit scheduled for December have been put at risk by a conflict over whether President Robert Mugabe will be allowed to attend as Zimbabwe's official representative.

Some EU nations, notably Britain, have threatened to boycott the summit if Mugabe is invited, while a number of African governments have warned that they will not send representatives if Mugabe is prevented from attending the Lisbon meeting.

The controversy illustrates the divide between western states that accuse Mugabe of committing human rights abuses and ruining Zimbabwe's once-prosperous economy, and the African



Credit: Lazele

*Mugabe addresses a ZANU-PF crowd gathered at party headquarters in Harare. Picture taken July 6, 2007.*

continent, where many view him as a latter-day Robin Hood standing up to imperialism.

The 83-year old president is still seen as a comrade-in-arms in much of Africa, except in Zimbabwe itself, where many accuse him of presiding over an eight-

year economic and political crisis that has seen unemployment reach 80 per cent and inflation soar to an official 3,700 per cent year on year.

The divergence of opinion about Mugabe is reflected in the current standoff between the EU and Africa

### NEWS IN BRIEF

■ Zimbabwe is "closer than ever to complete collapse" under the weight of a deepening economic crisis that threatens to destabilise Southern Africa, the International Crisis Group, ICG, said in a new report released this week. ICG called on the nations of the Southern African Development Community to overcome internal divisions and focus on how to persuade Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe to step down.

■ Although the humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe ranks among the world's worst, it is still largely being ignored by the international community,

David Coltart, a member of parliament who is a leading member of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, said on September 17. Coltart said the crisis was now too big for any nation to tackle on its own.

■ The planned passing of legislation by the Zimbabwe government that would result in majority shares of all listed firms being placed in local hands will reduce foreign investment flows and worsen Zimbabwe's economic woes, business leaders warned on September 17.

■ Three members of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, ZCTU, were severely assaulted and arrested on September 17 for distributing campaign materials ahead of a "stay-away" strike action planned for on September 19 and 20. A statement issued by ZCTU information officer Khumbulani Ndlovu said three trade unionists — national organiser Michael Kandukutu, Tennyson Muchepfa from the National Engineering Workers' Unions, and Justice Mucheni from the Food Federation — are being held at Mbare police station in the capital.

over whether he should be allowed into Portugal for the summit, despite the travel restrictions placed on him and his top officials by the EU and the United States.

The last EU-Africa summit was held in 2000, as a meeting scheduled for 2003 was scrapped because of conflict over whether Mugabe could attend. The events are intended to discuss aid and development, which the Europeans often frame within the context of human rights and democracy.

African nations, particularly those in the Southern African Development Community, SADC, led by regional economic powerhouse South Africa, have said they will not attend the summit if Zimbabwe is excluded.

The EU's external relations commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner last week suggested that Zimbabwe could be represented by a senior government official such as the foreign minister, as a way of breaking the deadlock.

"We should not let our political relationship with Africa fall apart because of Mugabe," Ferrero-Waldner told the German daily *Financial Times Deutschland*.

However, the SADC has rejected this compromise.

South Africa and other regional states insist they want Zimbabwe to be represented at the highest level, in order to avoid setting a precedent where African leaders are singled out for punishment if Europe objects to them.

The current SADC chair, Zambian president Levy Mwanawasa, underlined this position when he claimed Zimbabwe's problems were "exaggerated" by the media.

The African Union, AU, is taking a similar stand.

"It would not be fair not to invite a member of the African Union," Ghana's foreign minister Akwasi Osei Adjei, whose country holds the AU chair, said last week in remarks quoted by Reuters.

"I believe we are coming with all the members of the African Union, the heads of state of the African Union. So definitely the invitation [to Mugabe] will be issued."

The host country and EU president, Portugal, has been ambivalent about whether it will invite the Zimbabwean leader.

As an EU official acknowledged, "Almost all Africans want Mugabe to be present. The Africans are really making this an issue. It could be difficult to sort this out."

A political analyst at the University of Zimbabwe, John Makumbe, told *Voice of America* that one side would have to give.

### **"We should not let our political relationship with Africa fall apart because of Mugabe" — EU external relations commissioner.**

He said the EU needed the summit as it wanted to resolve the problem of illegal migrants from northern Africa flocking into countries such as Portugal and Spain in search of a better life.

"Unfortunately, they will have to accept President Mugabe at the summit if they want that issue discussed," said Makumbe.

Makumbe said African leaders were unlikely to back down on the issue — not least because many were potentially vulnerable to criticism themselves, so found it hard to be too tough on Mugabe.

He said the only compromise was for EU leaders to brace themselves for Mugabe to be present, and try to raise their human rights concerns with him.

Another political scientist, who requested anonymity, agreed that African leaders would settle for nothing less, adding that the EU and the United States had laid themselves open to charges of double standards by failing to act uniformly in all political disputes in Africa.

He cited recent cases where the international community did not take resolute action where there were allegations of vote-rigging and other electoral problems.

"There were, and still are, problems in Lesotho about the way Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili was elected [in February 2007], but the EU and the US have said nothing. There were allegations that [outgoing president] Olusegun Obasanjo fixed the Nigerian election [in April 2007] to have his favourite candidate elected, and nothing happened to him," he said.

"There was an even bigger disaster in the DRC, where over 200 people were killed in protests soon after the [2006] elections when rebels loyal to Jean-Pierre Bemba tried to stir civil unrest alleging that Joseph Kabila had stolen the election. We didn't hear any international outcry about illegality and sanctions."

He concluded, "This lends credence to those who claim that the dispute with Zimbabwe has been reduced to a personal vendetta with Mugabe for taking over white-owned commercial farms more than it is to do with human rights violations or vote-rigging.

"So come December, European leaders will have to share the table with Mugabe — or there will be no summit."

Analysts say the EU is desperate for this year's summit to succeed. Apart from the migration issue, there is concern that Europe and the US have lost ground to China in recent years, and the December summit would offer a forum for discussing how to deal with this.

China consumes substantial amounts of African oil and minerals such as copper. In return, the continent offers a market for Chinese exports — and at a political level, diplomatic allies in international institutions such as the United Nations Security Council.

*Joseph Sithole is the pseudonym of a journalist in Zimbabwe.* ■

# HARARE LOSING KEY ALLIES

**With Libya and now seemingly China cooling off, some say Mugabe's remaining friends are purely of sentimental value.**

**By Mike Nyoni in Harare**

The dwindling number of state visits to Zimbabwe reflect President Robert Mugabe's increasing isolation from the rest of the world.

A recent visit by Equatorial Guinea's Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo thus came as a welcome diversion for the elderly president, who showed his guest around the capital Harare with great enthusiasm.

Officially, Obiang came to open an agricultural show, but observers say his trip had more to do with his bid to extradite alleged coup plotter Simon Mann to Equatorial Guinea to face trial for the foiled coup against Obiang's government.

Mann is currently in jail in Zimbabwe, but it is believed he may be "traded" to oil-rich Equatorial Guinea in return for some much-needed fuel.

But just as Obiang flew out on August 31, Mugabe was brought down to earth with the shock that his closest ally China had made a policy u-turn on Zimbabwe. Britain's Foreign Office minister Mark Malloch-Brown told reporters on an official visit to China on August 30 that he had been assured by his hosts that they would apply more pressure on "rogue states".

"I was told that Chinese assistance to Zimbabwe was now limited to humanitarian assistance, which is enormously important," said Malloch-Brown.

This must come as a major blow to Mugabe, who has trumpeted his "Look East Policy" as a counter to what he



Credit: Lazele

*President Robert Mugabe (left) and Equatorial Guinea president Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo inspect stands at the 2007 Agriculture Show in Harare. Picture taken August 31, 2007.*

sees as undue interference in Zimbabwe's affairs by western countries, which have imposed "targeted sanctions" on him and senior party and government officials.

**Simon Mann may be extradited to Equatorial Guinea in return for much-needed fuel.**

Mugabe received another rebuff when one of his fiercest critics, Australia, revoked study permits for eight children of government officials, including those of Reserve Bank governor Gideon Gono.

There have been very few state visits to Harare since the country launched its controversial land reform programme in 2000, which was accompanied by violence and human rights violations. The action led to worldwide condemnation, culminating in the country's current isolation.

Mugabe's decision to leave the Commonwealth of former British colonies in 2003 all but completed the country's isolation from the international community — except for countries in the Southern African region.

What visits have occurred have been limited to official, one-day trips by regional leaders to see how Zimbabwe can be plucked out of what many see as a man-made humanitarian crisis. So Obiang's three-day state visit must have come as something of a relief to Mugabe who is desperate to show that he still has friends besides those in the Southern African Development Community, SADC.

The visit saw delegates from Equatorial Guinea whisked in a large cavalcade up to the resort town of Victoria Falls, about 800 kilometres by road from Harare. There was very little official information about the purpose of Obiang's visit and most of the meetings were held behind closed doors.

Aside from the formal negotiations, Mugabe took Obiang on a tour of family projects in his home district of Zvimba in Mashonaland West province, including Gushungo Farm, a livestock enterprise he owns. The farm's animals were to be displayed at the agricultural show as a demonstration of black economic empowerment. Obiang was later taken to a farm owned by First Lady Grace Mugabe's brother, Reward Marufu.

**"The only friends who really made a difference to Mugabe were Gaddafi and Hu Jintao" — newspaper editor in Zimbabwe.**

The tour ended with a dinner hosted by the First Lady herself at the Iron Mask farm, seized from an elderly white couple at the height of the land reform programme.

At the time, Grace Mugabe claimed she wanted the property to set up a home for orphans and other displaced children on Harare's streets. Work on the project is only beginning now.

Outside the SADC, Mugabe's friends can be counted on the fingers of one hand — above all, China, Cuba and Vietnam. Relations with Israel have been ambivalent, with Zimbabwe always expressing support for the Palestinians but sourcing the instruments of repression such as teargas, water cannons and other riot gear from the Israelis.

Of late, Mugabe has also been getting messages of solidarity from another populist leader, Hugo Chavez of Venezuela. Although he enjoys a lot of support in the region, Mugabe rarely visits other countries except to attend official occasions like SADC or African Union summits. He does not get many visitors of note, either, except a few envoys delivering messages from their leaders.

According to a senior editor on an independent newspaper in Zimbabwe, China's latest policy pronouncement will be a painful blow for Mugabe, especially after losing another friend, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

"The only friends who really made a difference to Mugabe were Gaddafi and [Chinese president] Hu Jintao because they offered material support — Gaddafi with fuel and Hu militarily and in the construction of infrastructure such as roads," said the editor.

In 2001, Zimbabwe and Libya signed a deal in which the former was to supply 15000 tonnes of beef per year to the latter in return for oil. But the deal fell through when Zimbabwe failed to deliver because of the disruption wrought on the beef industry by the farm invasions, which began in 2000. Libya then allowed Zimbabwe to pay for fuel imports in local currency but when the Zimbabwean currency plummeted in value, it scrapped the deal.

**"China's policy u-turn means the end of the much-touted 'Look East Policy'" — civil servant in Harare.**

"Gaddafi is now a friend of the west after debilitating sanctions almost crippled Libya's economy. Any Gaddafi liaison with Mugabe now seems aimed at convincing him to follow his example of softening his stance against the West," continued the editor.

He said it was telling that former British prime minister Tony Blair had paid a valedictory visit to Tripoli as telling. Mugabe went there soon afterwards but reports say he returned empty-handed.

"China's policy u-turn means the end of the much-touted 'Look East Policy'," said a Harare civil servant working in the ministry of foreign

affairs, adding that China was the most important trading partner in the Far East.

According to the Washington-based Council on Foreign Relations, Mugabe ordered 12 FC-1 fighter jets and 100 military vehicles from China in a deal in 2004 worth 200 million US dollars.

**"Without Libya and China, Mugabe's remaining friends are now purely of sentimental value" — Zimbabwean civil servant.**

In 2000, China reportedly swapped a shipment of small arms for eight tonnes of Zimbabwean elephant ivory. It provided a radio jamming device to Zimbabwe that allows Mugabe's regime to block broadcasts of independent news sources like Radio Africa. And also donated the blue tiles that decorate the roof of Mugabe's house.

The civil servant also pointed out that without China's backing, the Zimbabwean crisis would now be discussed in the United Nations Security Council, "China has been using its veto to block the discussion of the Zimbabwe crisis. World attention will now be refocused on Zimbabwe. We would expect a UN resolution on Zimbabwe in due course.

"Without Libya and China, Mugabe's remaining friends are now purely of sentimental value."

The Chinese embassy in Harare issued a statement on September 4 denying any policy u-turn and citing ongoing projects as evidence of continued collaboration. However, analysts attributed this to "diplomatic double speak" and said the embassy statement referred to the policy of the Chinese Communist Party and not that of the government, which Malloch-Brown was citing.

*Mike Nyoni is the pseudonym of an IWPR journalist in Zimbabwe. ■*



# MUGABE CHURCH DONATION RAISES EYEBROWS

**Gesture comes as a surprise to those who thought he had cut ties with the Catholic Church.**

**By Jacob Nhlanhla in Bulawayo**

Amid escalating calls to excommunicate him from the Roman Catholic Church, President Robert Mugabe has donated a large sum of money to it.

After damaging stand-offs between the Zimbabwean ruler and the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishop's Conference, ZCBC, as well as highly regarded critic Archbishop of Bulawayo Pius Ncube, some analysts see the 300 million Zimbabwe dollar donation (one million US dollars at the official exchange rate and just over 1,000 US dollars on the black market), made late last month to a women's Catholic Church grouping, the Marian Association, as more of an electioneering stunt than a way of making amends with the church.

Mugabe describes himself as a devout Catholic who attends Sunday mass regularly. However, fellow Catholics maintain he should have been excommunicated long ago from the church that raised him, for failing to respect human rights and good governance.

But Father Oskar Wermter, a Jesuit missionary priest who has lived in Zimbabwe for over 30 years, said calls to excommunicate Mugabe were "old hat" and were unlikely to be heard. "This was mooted years ago. It was explained then that this was no longer done today. At any rate, excommunication in a strict legal or canonical sense is a measure applied only in certain circumstances defined by church law," he said.

Wermter, based in Harare, said that while excommunication had been



*The Roman Catholic cathedral in Harare, Mugabe's usual place of worship. Picture taken September 18, 2007.*

Credit: Lazele

invoked in the past to deal with political leaders — heads of governments, kings and emperors — who violated human rights abuses, the phenomenon was rare in the 21st century.

"We no longer live in the Middle Ages. The local bishops do not even have that power. It would have to come from the Pope himself," explained Wermter.

But he added that renewed calls for Mugabe to be excommunicated were indicative of people's growing desperation to see a resolution to the crisis that has gripped Zimbabwe for the past ten years.

Ecumenical efforts to find solutions to Zimbabwe's woes under the faith-based Christian Alliance and the Save Zimbabwe Campaign banners — groupings of local Christian denominations and pro-democracy activists — have been snubbed by both Mugabe and his ruling ZANU-PF party.

Early this year, Pope Benedict XVI expressed his support for the ZCBC after it issued its most vocal pastoral

letter since the crisis set in, blaming Mugabe for the escalation of human rights abuses and for destroying a once-vibrant economy.

While Catholics here continue to call for Mugabe's excommunication, the president insists he is just an "ordinary Catholic who goes to mass every Sunday".

Mugabe was educated by Jesuit missionaries but made the shift from altar boy to radical nationalist when he joined the nationalist movement in the early 1960s, which he went on to lead in a bitter guerrilla war against Ian Smith, then prime minister of Rhodesia. The war culminated in the country's independence from Britain in 1980.

Calls for Mugabe's excommunication from the Catholic Church were first made after the human rights abuses during the "Gukurahundi Era" in the early 1980s were exposed: an estimated 20,000 people were killed under Mugabe's rule in the Matabeleland uprisings — a travesty which was documented by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, CCJP.

Almost three decades later, and with his fight against his opposition party detractors now encompassing his critics in the Catholic Church, the calls for excommunication have grown louder. Derrick Shorai, an official with the CCJP in Harare, says he, along with many of Zimbabwe's Catholics, has always supported the idea of having Mugabe excommunicated.

"Perhaps it shows our desperation to get rid of him not just as a Catholic but as the country's president," said Shorai.

"Mugabe has caused so much untold suffering, but still enjoys access to the sacraments. We just don't know how he has been able to receive these, despite his known human rights abuses."

Reacting to the pastoral letter issued by the ZCBC earlier this year, strongly criticising Mugabe's regime, the 83-year-old leader warned the bishops to stay away from politics or risk being dealt with as opposition political activists.

The veiled threats escalated recently when on July 7, during the burial of an army brigadier at the country's Heroes Acre burial shrine, Mugabe chastised "priests who steal other men's wives". A fortnight later, one of his fiercest critics, Archbishop Pius Ncube of Bulawayo, was accused of being an adulterer in the media.

Among the archbishop's supporters are those who believe the exposé was a carefully orchestrated sting operation by Mugabe's lieutenants to disgrace the archbishop.

A pastor with Christian Alliance who preferred to remain anonymous said, "While the people's concerns would appear legitimate, you cannot trust a man accused of so much to take this lying down. His relationship with the Catholic Church especially has always been stormy but we have to understand that it is God who will judge him, not us."

Retired Bulawayo archbishop Henry Kalern was reluctant to talk about the issue, citing the present controversy surrounding his successor.

According to Wermter, Mugabe has "effectively excommunicated himself", given the sustained human rights abuses meted out by his government.

"In a very real way, though not technically as defined by church law, Mugabe has effectively excommunicated himself, that is to say put himself outside the community of the church, by resisting the word of the church and attacking the bishops in a most offensive, vulgar form. At least the constant propaganda line that he is a 'practising, devout Catholic' is now shown to be false," he told IWPR.

But Mugabe, always the wily politician, has begun to make amends. His donation came as a surprise to those who thought he had cut ties with the Catholic Church after his run-ins with the bishops and the Ncube incident.

"There are two reasons he could have [made the donation]," said one local Catholic who refused to be identified. "The Catholic Church has a huge following in Zimbabwe and the elections are coming. He does not wish to lose that vote. Also he might be in his own way telling the Catholics that he still belongs."

Mugabe handed over the money through his ally in the ruling party and presidential hopeful Oppah Muchinguri. The donation was confirmed by Bishop Patrick Mutume of Harare who said it would be invested on the money market until a decision was made on how it could be best utilised.

Muchinguri is at the forefront of the campaign for Mugabe's nomination as ZANU-PF's sole candidate in next year's election. She is eyeing the vice-presidential post for herself, and is fighting tooth and nail to have incumbent Joice Mujuru fired.

*Jacob Nhlanhla is the pseudonym of an IWPR journalist in Zimbabwe.* ■

The Zimbabwe Crisis Report is an initiative of IWPR-Africa's Zimbabwe Programme. This programme promotes democratization and good governance with Southern Africa and contributes to the development of a culture of human rights and the rule of law. Focusing on Zimbabwe the programme has three core components —

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