

May 28, 1992

Memo

To: Southern Africa Support and Human Rights Groups

From: Adotei Akwei, Research Department

Re: Drought And Famine in Southern Africa:

There is a disaster in the making which will make the famine and drought cases of the 1980s seem mild in comparison. Southern Africa is reeling from the worst drought of the century which may ultimately claim the lives of millions of people. Among the most vulnerable

as usual are the rural poor, the elderly, and children.

The severe drought caused by the warming of Pacific Ocean currents that affect air pressure and wind patterns known as "El Nino" is wreaking devastation on people already burdened by inequitable land distribution and wars of destabilization. These wars have cost the region over one and a half million lives and sixty two million dollars in gross domestic product between 1980 and 1988 alone. In addition many of the governments are either in the process of dismantling or reorganizing to accommodate democratic reform and western style economic policies, leaving the majority of their populations without much of

a safety net in terms of government resources.

Beyond the immediate need for food there is concern about long term damage on the region. The southern African landscape of scorched fields of failed crops stretches from Angola to South Africa and is in danger of becoming a permanent dustbowl.

The 10 nation Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) has launched a campaign to encourage international support to combat the famine which will affect close to 30 million people in Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Preventative action can still be taken now. The crisis period of greatest food scarcity will be next summer beginning in October 1992. In addition to the work of international relief agencies the United States can take steps to prevent the famine disasters of the 1980's from repeating themselves. groups like

Bread For the World, InterAction have called for specific actions:

1. Congress must provide at least \$710 million in PL 100-204, Title II Food Aid for Fiscal Year (FY) 1993, (the same level as FY 1992) be ready to provide more if needed.
2. Increase funding levels for SADCC to \$75 million in the FY 1993 foreign aid appropriation. The additional funds will be used for famine mitigation activities and improvement of transportation networks. Building up southern African transportation networks is essential to effective distribution of food and other emergency items.

3. Be Prepared, if necessary later in the spring, to approve supplemental funds for FY 1992 for food and/or disaster assistance. Because of the massive harvest failure this year in many southern African countries, seeds in particular will be needed by farmers in order to plant next year.

Please write to your congress person and/or your local press to support increased Food Aid for Southern Africa. Help save some lives!

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Chairman Executive Director

are increasingly nxxlom for intemational food aid.

In Zimbabwe the maize shortage are causing political heat. Innuential MP Sabina Mugabe, sister of Robert, oencelled meetings in her eon-stituency beats: she hm no amwers about the lack of maize deliveries. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCI'U) has called for the resignation of Agricultural Minister Witness Mangwende. .

'But one crucial aspect of the debate is being omitted: who is responsible for the agricultural policies which allowed the region's food shortage to reach such a desperate stage? The maize shortage in Zimbabwe. and throughout the region, is not simply due to drought. but also is the result of agricultural policies pushed by donors.

As-co-ordinator for food security in the . Southem African Development Co-ordinatidn Conference (SADCC), why can't Zimbabwe 8get its prices right" for maize'LWhere are the regional grain storage facilities discussed by the SADCC since 1982?

Although international food aid will keep many southem Africans alive this year, donors have often compounded the hardships of natural disasters.

The United States, for example, pressed the Zimbabwean government to lower the prlce

TARVATION is already apparent in Mozambique, while Malawi and Zambia

Grim harVest of donor policiES

Forei In aid dollars to southern A ica have contributed to the roblems o the re ion b imistin that controversial a ricultural Iicies be ado le writes CAROL THOMPSON

offered to farmers for- maize production, arguing that Zimbabwe's surplus maize was costly to store and that its high grade tobacco could bring in foreign exchange. '

Zimbabwe resisted this policy for several years, citing the SADCCgoal of regional food security in grain.

By the 1%, however, the price of maize was lowered to encourage commercial and small farmers to shift to tobacco, which they did. Zimbabwean cereal production fell 21 percent in 1990-91. The 1991/92 prdducer price Was the lowest in real terms since 1970, and farmers responded by planting only 60 percent of the hectarage planted in maize in average years. Even in the midst of drought, irrllgated maize instead of tobacco would be feeding more people. And because the international demand for maize is high this year, inllated prices will consume the foreign exchange earned by tobawo.

To cut the expense of storing grain in a surplus year, as early as 1986 the Zimbabwe government proposed a triangular t_rade/aid package. Zimbabwe would pay for wheat it imported from the US with exports of white Zimbabwean maize to Mozambique. The Zimbabwean maize would become American food aid to Mozambique!

But in 1986-87 when Zimbabwe had a surplus of two million tons, the US agreed to Zimbabwe transferring only 7 000 tons of maize to Mozambique in exchange for US wheat. By

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1988 there were no triangular transactions with the US.

The US Department of Agriculture was resistant to the policy, explicitly stating that US food aid was to reduce surplus (and highly subsidised) American maize. It did not matter that American yellow maize is considered cattle feed by Mozambicans, explained a US Agency for International Development (US AID) official, for "they will acquire a taste for yellow maize", eventually creating a market for US maize. This year Zimbabweans have a chance to acquire the same taste.

With 8 Zimbabwe surplus of 1,54 million tons in 1989, Zimbabwe's Commercial Grain Producers Association asked the US to stop dumping maize into Malawi, US AID assured the organisation that it was only contemplating shipping maize for relief in Mozambique. Shortly thereafter, a lorry on its way to Malawi was in an accident in Zimbabwe, spilling yellow American maize all over the road. Another 17 000 tons were still off the coast of South Africa. Not only ignoring the transport corridors refurbished by SADCC, the US was also dismissing any idea of using the stockpile of Zimbabwe maize, which would reduce the costs of storage.

The European Community (EC) also has added to the burden of the drought. The SADCC has planned since 1982 to build regional grain storage silos, so a surplus producer like Zimbabwe could have a guaranteed market and a deficit country like Mozambique would know ready reserves were at hand. The EC agreed to finance the first three years in 1988, but then told the SADCC that it would decide who received the grain and when. -

The SADCC refused, with the head of the SADCC Food Security Unit stating: "We cannot allow foreigners to administer our food aid programme. Major donors are using food aid as a weapon to influence policies of governments." Because the costs are high to build silos and initially store the grain, the project is still not off the ground, yet regional reserves could have greatly reduced costs this year.

Southern Africa's ability to respond to the worst drought this century is constrained by over a decade of apartheid aggression in the region (costing \$65-billion 1980-90 with more than 1.6 million killed, according to the United Nations International Children's Education Fund). Can those who have been Western partners of apartheid simply claim donor fatigue? In southern Africa?

An early report estimates that only one-third of the 10 million tonnes needed for the region will come in the form of aid. The rest will be purchased by the debt-burdened countries from commercial sources at international prices. Some donors have been partners in the successful projects of the SADCC, such as transport corridors which are bringing in the lifesaving maize. Perhaps the donors will also admit that their agricultural consultancies have proven to be not only inappropriate, but fatal, for a drought-prone region. 3 .

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southern Africa's drought is a natural disaster of biblical proportions. It is the worst this century. scorching crops right across the continent from Angola on the west coast to Mozambique and Tanzania on the east.

The drought respects no boundaries. At a time when southern Africa is caught up in a tenuous peace process and difficult democratization efforts, the drought has weighed in heavily on political balances throughout the region. '

In some cases, the effects of the drought are tipping the political scales in favor of change. such as in Malawi. In other countries, the drought is hindering the process of democratic reform. as in Zambia. The drought is threatening Angola's hard-won peace and is troubling Namibia's stability.

Of course. the biggest victim of the drought is maize. Fields of the failed crops stretch from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean and the drought has called into question the suitability of maize as the region's staple grain. The insistent demands of hungry populations for maize meal have also forced leaders to question the political wisdom of remaining so dependent upon the crop.

Maize was introduced to Africa by the Portuguese who brought it from the Americas. It was widely promoted by colonial agriculturalists as a staple food and a lucrative export grain.

Only now, with the widespread crop failure and the region's need to import an estimated 11 million tons of maize. are experts and peasants alike considering indigenous and drought-resistant grains like sorghum and millet. Southern Africa's ports and road and rail networks are going to be severely strained to move efficiently such large amounts of maize and other foods. South Africa. importing 4.5 million tons of corn. has announced its ports will be full handling its own needs. That means Zimbabwe. Zambia. and Malawi must rely on the notoriously inefficient ports of Mozambique and Tanzania for their maize imports.

Namibia lost 80 percent of its maize crop, forcing the Nujoma government to spend foreign currency for imports that it had planned to use on improving housing and education for its long-deprived majority. Lesotho expects to harvest just 45,000 tons of maize. compared to its normal 120,000 tons. That should scramble the already confused political situation there as the population braces for the expected skyrocketing prices. Normally lush Malawi has only produced 700,000 tons of maize. half its ordinary yield. With 1.2 million extra mouths to feed-the number of Malawi's Mozambican refugees-the Banda regime is particularly susceptible to pressure for political reforms from nations donating food aid. Already the government responded to Scandinavian pressure to release some political prisoners, but now the political stakes are even higher.

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Maize plays a prominent role in Zambian politics. as well as in its diet. Kenneth Kaunda's government kept the country's urban population happy with low. state-subsidized maize prices. Zambia's maize was. comparatively, the cheapest in the region. But the subsidy became a heavy burden on the state budget and the low prices offered to producers gave farmers little incentive to grow maize.

When Kaunda tried to remove the subsidy and raise maize prices, in 1986 and again in 1990. food riots broke out. The June 1990 disturbances rocked Zambia nation-

wide and launched the democratization process that led to Kaunda's defeat at the polls.

The drought has made it even more difficult for new President Frederick Chiluba's government to carry out a tough economic structural adjustment program which includes the removal of subsidies. Now Kaunda, leader of the opposition, is trying to make political capital of the high food prices—a result of both Chiluba's economic policies and the drought. The drought has helped to hasten the end of Chiluba's political honeymoon.

In Angola, the drought is threatening to undermine the ceasefire agreement and progress toward national elections. About 100,000 army and rebel fighters, as stated in the peace accord, have gathered at designated camps to avoid disturbing the peace in the run-up to the national elections in September. But the drought has caused a maize shortage that is shoving hungry, armed soldiers out of the camps in search of something to eat. They could upset the plans to establish a new government.

Mozambique's war still rages on and the drought has proved to be fuel for even more banditry and violence. There is not enough food in the country, but plenty of arms and ammunition. Neither the Chissano government nor Renamo are able to effectively control their hungry troops. Armed bands from both sides are marauding the countryside in search of food. In Maputo, people refer to "their bandits," meaning Renamo's rebels, and to "our bandits," meaning the army's hungry thieves.

For years, southern Africa has been plagued by wars and misery, but generally enough rain has fallen for people to feed themselves. The promise of peace, democracy, and stability which appeared within the region's grasp last year has been made that much harder by the drought's scorching effects.

In Zimbabwe, the drought has become a major factor in the country's political equation. Many derisive comments and cynical jokes about the Mugabe government are heard while standing in the lengthy queues for corn meal, Zimbabwe's staple food, throughout the country. Waiting to buy a 10-pound bag of maize meal in front of one Harare supermarket, a household servant sighs. "Everything is scarce these days. I have waited for sugar and cooking oil and now mealie meal (corn meal)," she said. "This drought is making things tough."

A talkative gardener standing behind her says it is not only the drought but also the government's economic structural adjustment program (ESAP) which is causing 'Ca'

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problems. tDo you know what ESAP stands for? Ever Suffering African People," he said, causing wry chuckles throughout the line.

At another supermarket queue, the joke is that Robert Mugabe has a new title: The Emir of Queue-Wait. There are many more remarks in Shona, the language of 75 percent of Zimbabwe's 10.5 million people, nearly all of them with the Mugabe government as the butt of the joke.

A few years ago, such public criticism of the government was rare; now it is commonplace. Zimbabweans are making jokes, expressing worry and dissatisfaction, but it would be a mistake to construe that unhappiness as support for an immediate overthrow of the government.

"No, we aren't very happy about the current maize shortage, the drought, the economy, corruption," said Miriam Mandaza, a sales assistant in a Harare store. "But who would replace Mugabe? Everybody knows the alternatives are worse. Maybe by the next national elections 1995, we will have a better choice."

So net voters won't have to wait until 1995. Two parliamentary by-elections are being held in May in which five

different parties and one independent are contesting the two seats. In early April in Bulawayo, Isabel Pasalk formed the Zimbabwe People's Democratic Party to protest the shortage of staples. So far, Zimbabwe's opposition parties have remained fragmented and insignificant, but they are an important political escape valve, allowing voters to vent opposition to the ruling party without having to resort to overturning the whole system.

In recent weeks, the drought has drastically increased the political problems confronting Robert Mugabe's government by creating a shortage of staple foods. There have been mad scrambles for scarce goods, melees, and mini-riots within supermarkets. To avoid such trouble, stores are unloading truckloads under cover of night and guards have been hired to keep orderly the sales of items in short supply.

Rural peasants would be happy to stand in queues. Many subsistence farmers have run short of maize and some are already scavenging for edible roots and berries. In Zimbabwe's poorest area along the Zambezi Valley, desperate people are surviving on a porridge of baobab roots and sand.

The drought has dried up the water supplies of Bulawayo, Mutare, Masvingo, and Gweru. Strict water rationing is in force in those cities. The low level of Lake Kariba means a reduction in the dam's power-generating capacity and a system of rotating power cuts was announced until the next rains fall in November.

Food queues, water rationing, and power cuts are all drought-caused hardships. Add to this the dramatically escalating prices for food, higher school fees, and hospital charges that are part of the government's structural adjustment program. Yet more trouble has cropped up in the form of strikes and go-slows.

The pileup of problems is enough to give a throbbing headache to any political leader. If not handled skillfully, these troubles could threaten, even bring down a government. In typical Zimbabwean fashion, the country's combination of drought and economic problems is being bungled so that there is chaos and disorganization, but underneath there is enough planning and resources to pull the country—and the government—through.

Mugabe responded to Zimbabwe's congestion of crises by taking two weeks leave. He went to Ireland following the death in February of his wife, Sally. Mugabe stayed at the fabulous Irish estate of Tony O'Reilly, chairman of the American multinational food processor, HJ. Heinz. Heinz has a large investment in Zimbabwe and Mugabe and O'Reilly have met on numerous occasions.

But Mugabe was far too canny, even when grief-stricken, to allow Zimbabwe's political situation to unravel in his absence. He left Zimbabwe in the hands of his vice presidents, Joshua Nkomo and Simon Muzenda, and his cabinet ministers. More importantly, he left an astutely drawn-up blueprint detailing how his ministers should deal with the drought. The savvy Mugabe did not trust the drought effort to any single person or team. He appointed eight cabinet ministers to head up the drought relief measures in their home provinces. The ministers can be relied upon to make sure their own provinces, their areas of political support, will get their fair share of emergency food assistance.

After the initial disorder and melees in the supermarket aisles, a more orderly system of queues has been established for maize, meal, bread, sugar, cooking oil, and other short items. Money also talks, and in Zimbabwe's thriving black market, township dwellers can buy the scarce items at prices double and triple the controlled prices in the supermarkets.

To ensure smooth delivery of the orders of maize

imported from the United States, Zimbabwean Transport Minister Denis Norman made an unprecedented trip to Cape Town, South Africa. where he met with his South African counterpart, Piet Welgemoed. Shortly after the meeting, the first-ever between South African and Zimbabwean cabinet ministers. South Africa's government-owned railway company. Spoornet. announced it would bring 15.500 rail wagons out of mothballs to speed up regional deliveries of imported grain.

Zimbabwe is in a muddled state at the moment. but it is getting by. Robert Mugabe returned from his leave, but there are persistent rumors that the Zimbabwean president will step down from government. These do not appear to be well-founded. although even cabinet members are speculating over who will succeed Mugabe. It is much more likely that Mugabe will steer Zimbabwe through these drought and economic troubles.

Back in the commonplace supermarket queues. the latest rumor is that there will be shortages of salt and toilet paper. True or not, it has prompted a run on those items. making the rumor a self-fulfilling prophecy.

"Hmmp." grumbled an unhappy housewife grabbing an extra roll of toilet paper. The only thing we don't have a shortage of these days is people." 0

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