

**Eddie Cross: comments on various issues  
affecting poverty in Zimbabwe**

In this interview Eddie Cross comments on diverse issues such as GM foods, land reform, Zimbabwe's experience of the IMF and World Bank, Nepad and the African Union, Zimbabwe's relationship with Libya and South Africa and the recent election results.

**An electronic interview given to  
*Black Electorate*: A magazine in the USA.**

**Eddie Cross**

Secretary for Economic Affairs, the Movement for Democratic Change,  
Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.  
egcross@africaonline.co.zw

6th September 2002

**In addition to the answer just given here are a few more to round out a thorough interview which I hope you will grant us:**

**1) What is your position on the acceptance of genetically modified food and its implications for trade between Zimbabwe and EU?**

A) In the present case we are talking only GM maize (corn in the US). Since it is about 50 years since we last sold maize grain to anyone in Europe—the only continent with a ban on GM foods, it is unlikely to affect our exports. These are mainly to the region and to the Far East where the issue is rather academic. The MDC is satisfied that there is nothing wrong with GM maize from a human point of view—we are concerned that our seed industry, which is the largest in the region, might be affected but with South Africa already 30 per cent GM and going to 50 per cent shortly, this is also academic. The Limpopo will not prevent contamination from the South. Zimbabwe has just accepted GM maize following UN intervention on the side of sanity.

**2) What do you make of the argument that White farmers shouldn't be compensated for land that was stolen or taken?**

A) I agree completely with the view that land which was stolen or taken by force from its rightful owners should be returned to them without compensation to the person who have been using and benefiting from possession until the time of hand back. This will in fact be the position of the MDC when the rule of law is re-established after a change of government is finally affected in Zimbabwe.

In the case of the current crop of white farmers (4 200 commercial farmers out of 21 000 commercial farmers in Zimbabwe), 83 per cent have purchased their farms after independence in 1980. Most have a certificate issued by the Mugabe government which states quite clearly that this transaction had their approval at the time of purchase as the land in question was not needed for resettlement.

The majority of the remainder (17 per cent) obtained their farms as land grants or purchases of "state land" from the government or simply as commercial purchases in the period after the second world war when there was an influx of settlers to Zimbabwe encouraged by the then British government. In this respect thousands of other white settlers also went to other Commonwealth Dominions—Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. Some also went to Kenya, Zambia and Malawi. This process was legal at the time and in the majority of cases involved vacant state land in the colonies.

Since taking over their farms these individuals and companies (at least a third are corporate farms—some with huge investments) have undertaken developments worth a conservative US\$6 billion (one trillion Zimbabwe dollars). All of this investment is freehold, its protection

guaranteed by the constitution of the country and by ordinary law. 90 per cent of the properties are bonded to financial institutions who are owed about Z\$30 billion.

These commercial farmers employed 30 per cent of the total number of people in employment, supported directly 2 million people at an average standard of living that was three times the level of incomes in the tribal or communal lands where 5 million people live in abject poverty. They generated 65 per cent of total farm output, 50 per cent of all exports and half of all grain supplies. They produced over 90 per cent of the sugar, milk and fruit in the country as well as 70 per cent of timber and meat. They received no subsidies of any kind and paid taxes.

The Mugabe regime has now launched a campaign to dispossess these farmers of everything they own. If they refuse to lie down and be raped, they are being thrown into jail. Their staff are being evicted and over 800 000 people are now officially internally displaced. Agricultural output has fallen by 60 per cent, exports have plummeted and half our population now face starvation. All basic foods are almost impossible to find. Inflation is running at 150 per cent or more—10 times the regional average.

Sure, we cannot stop the process short of launching a civil war—something we refuse to do, we cannot get rid of him and his corrupt cronies because they control the electoral system, we cannot even demonstrate on the streets of our towns and cities because the state will gun us down, ban our organisations and lock up our leaders. Black Americans, black Europeans must think carefully before they endorse this racist form of national suicide—because that is what it is in reality.

**3) Do you believe that White farmers are in any way more skilled than Black farmers? Is it not Black labourers who conduct most of the farming on White-owned properties anyway?**

A) We have 21 000 commercial farmers—16 800 are black and 4 200 are white. There are many very successful large scale black farmers. Most managers are black. It takes million of dollars to establish a commercial farming operation and the main problem for new farmers, whatever their skills, is finance. The 2000 corporate farms have no racial or gender category—they may be owned by foreign interests or mainly by pension funds. What is inescapable is that white Zimbabwean farmers have an enviable record for farming under very tough conditions—we have held the world record for yields in a dozen commodities—we hold 25 per cent of world demand for flue cured tobacco, we supply 8 per cent of European horticultural imports.

You must remember that white Zimbabweans are Africans—just as much as most black Africans are. The majority have been in southern Africa for generations—I have 5 generations behind me here. We know no other country or continent and feel quite alien when we visit the UK or the US.

**4) What has your interaction with the IMF and the World bank been like? Do you believe them to be trustworthy and their conditionality helpful to Zimbabwe?**

A) When a country gets into debt and then is unable to pay back its debts, it is faced with one of two alternatives—ask the creditor nations and companies to forgive the debt or to deal with the bank. There is only one banking system for countries and that is the IMF/World Bank and its continental affiliates (ADB for example). When we come to power in Zimbabwe we will have no choice but to deal with the bank—our creditors will insist on that. Debt relief might help but with debt now twice our current GDP and 10 times our annual exports, we will have no choice but to go the world community with cap in hand. That is part of the legacy of an irresponsible, corrupt and profligate regime under Mugabe.

Will that be helpful—if anyone has an alternative or the odd US\$10 billion to give away, we are listening. What we will do is to adopt policies which will serve the people of the country first and to introduce sensible macro economic policies which will eventually get us out of the hands of our creditors. But that will take time, and until then we will have to deal with the Bank and the IMF.

**5) The MDC has said and written in e-mails that we have received that it supports Mugabe in concept on the issue of land redistribution. What exactly does that support consist of?**

A) We have said from the very start that we support a land reform and redistribution process that will address all the problems that we have in respect to land on a simultaneous basis—the issue of poverty and insecurity in the communal areas, the issue of the inequalities in land ownership. The need to increase the number of young well trained black farmers on the land.

These goals would be achieved through a programme planned and managed by a professional land commission which would be given very specific targets and goals. The process would be required to protect the existing productive base of the industry, respect the rights of land owners, be transparent and open and must eventually put all farmers—irrespective of their size or ethnic background, on the same footing within an efficient and productive farming industry.

**6) Is the MDC supportive of the newly-established African union?**

A) Yes, and of NEPAD.

**7) What is your view of Libya's interaction with Zimbabwe of late?**

A) Libya's motives in supplying the Mugabe regime with liquid fuels paid for in Zimbabwe dollars at a premium exchange rate has several objectives:

- Cement the relationship they have with key states in Africa as part of their drive to build support outside of the EU and the USA. The effect of this is clearly seen in the role played by Libya in the formation of the AU and in the recent selection as nominee for the head of the UN Human Rights Commission by African delegates, including Zimbabwe.
- To make a profit for Tanoil and other Libyan interests which will then be ploughed into the Zimbabwe economy where assets can be obtained for very little as a consequence of the current turmoil and also where the state can allocate huge resources to Libyan interests without charge.
- To extend the influence of Muslim power in Africa and to do what they can to expand Muslim interests.

None of these goals has anything to do with the welfare of Zimbabwe and its people and the MDC has warned Libya that in the event that it takes power, all the deals struck so far will be subject to scrutiny and will be repudiated if they are not in the interests of the country or are deemed to have been corrupt in nature.

**8) On August 20th, the New York Times, citing anonymous senior State Department officials, wrote "the United States was working with human rights activists, labour unions and pro-democracy groups in Zimbabwe, as well as other southern African governments, to isolate the Mugabe government...". Do you desire such support from America? Do you think it is appropriate for the United States to deliberately undermine a President of an African nation?**

A) We think that the call for regime change in Iraq is much less justified than a call for regime change in Harare. We are grateful to the US for its firm stance on many issues in this country—the fraudulent elections (Bush was the first head of state to reject the March 2002 election results), the rule of law, the abuse of human and political rights taken for granted elsewhere in the world. Any country that stands with us on the issue of good governance, would be welcome in the current circumstances. Contrast this with the stand taken by France which has been ambivalent to say the least.

We do not recognise Mugabe as the legitimate head of state in Zimbabwe. As far as the MDC is concerned he was elected fraudulently and all sensible states throughout the world have accepted that point of view when confronted with the facts. Even the Commonwealth, working through a troika of Howard (Australia), Mbeki (South Africa) and Obasanjo (Nigeria) have suspended Zimbabwe from its ranks until a free and fair election is run again in the country.

What the EU, the Commonwealth and the USA/Canada have said very clearly—they want fresh elections held under an independent electoral commission and with international supervision. Only when that has taken place will they again allow Zimbabwe back into the

international community of nations. It not a question of undermining an African Head of State at all, its an issue of democracy and governance.

**9) What do you believe to be the appropriate role for South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki?**

A) The most important man in Zimbabwe is the Station Master at Messina in South Africa. If Mbeki decided that enough was enough, he could force Mugabe back to the ballot box in a matter of days. Only Mbeki has that kind of power if we are to rule out military intervention—which none of us want. Mbeki therefore has disproportionate responsibility for the collapse in Zimbabwe and in the effort to find a lasting solution.

Why is this important? For the following reasons:

- Zimbabwe is destabilising the whole of southern and central Africa—a region 5 times the size of Europe and with a population of over 400 million people.
- 2 million Zimbabweans already live in South Africa and represent up to half of all the people living in squatter camps. A very high proportion of South African crime is generated by illegal immigrants from Zimbabwe.
- Mugabe is violating every single principle on which the vision of NEPAD is grounded. He is violating all the main norms of good governance. His regime is now one of the most corrupt in the world.
- 85 per cent of all Zimbabweans now live in abject poverty and insecurity. 1 million have died of Aids since 1985, 500 000 will die of Aids related causes in the next 12 months. Half the population is on the edge of starvation and the economy is shrinking by 12 per cent per annum.
- Half all school age children are not in school and 65 per cent of all girls. Life expectancy for a woman has dropped by 22 years in the past decade.

What do we want to resolve this crisis—very simply, an opportunity to run a normal election for an executive head of state under standard conditions accepted throughout the world. We will gladly accept the outcome of such an election and will work with whoever is elected. I do not think this is too much to ask of the global community. What we do not need is the kind of mindless support for tyranny that we witnessed this week in Johannesburg. Ours is not a crisis over land or food—we have plenty of the former and can produce all we need of the latter if we had a sensible government. Our crisis is one of governance—plain and simple and until that is addressed the situation here can only get worse.