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Zimbabwe: Prospects for Democracy after the March 2005 Elections

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the recent Zimbabwean elections and to give my views on the future of that country.

Results and Conduct of the March 31 Parliamentary Election

As Secretary Rice made clear, the March 31 elections for Zimbabwe's parliament were a travesty of democratic standards. They were not free and fair. Instead, they are proof that Robert Mugabe and the ZANU-PF party continue to trample on Zimbabwe's democratic institutions and traditions; they continue to rule by fraud and coercion. The elections were a sad day for Zimbabwe and for the cause of democracy in the region.

Late last year, Zimbabwe's civil society and democratic movement debated whether to boycott the election. The opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party and many independent groups were doubtful that Mugabe would tolerate an honest election; they did not want MDC to legitimize a vote that was likely to be tainted. Their fears were not baseless: elections in 2000 and 2002 were marred by massive violence and fraud.

After much deliberation, MDC made a painful choice to enter the 2005 race to get out the democratic message to the people, and to keep ZANU-PF from monopolizing parliament. MDC ran a strong race. It had a popular message about economics, health, and democracy, and mounted a serious campaign in every district of the country, drawing large crowds in urban and rural areas alike. MDC has clearly emerged as a mature, viable opposition party. The fact that MDC even exists in spite of five years of heavy repression is testament to the enduring strength of democratic culture in Zimbabwe.

Unfortunately, MDC's pre-election concerns were valid. The independent press was muzzled; ZANU-PF candidates used food as a weapon to sway hungry voters; state-owned TV and radio were heavily biased; freedom of assembly was constrained; secret police attended opposition rallies taking down names. On election day, tens of thousands of voters were turned away

from the polls. The vote count was almost certainly rigged and credible evidence suggests that ZANU-PF stole more than a dozen seats from MDC.

Challenges to Democratic Change and Economic Security

The result is that Zimbabwe's parliament will continue to do the bidding of Robert Mugabe but will not speak for all of Zimbabwe's people. It lacks the legitimacy and the power to tackle the huge problems that are wrecking the country. It is difficult to overstate the size or danger of these challenges. The economy is collapsing; unemployment is more than 70 percent; food prices are going into orbit; political and economic refugees continue to flee, including some of Zimbabwe's best educated citizens; new investment is zero; firms are facing bankruptcy; and health care is collapsing in the face of a raging HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Worst of all, Zimbabwe may be on the brink of another food emergency brought on by drought and the government's disastrous economic policies. We do not know the full dimensions of the emergency, since Zimbabwe has barred assessment teams from the World Food Programme from entering the country. However, what evidence we have strongly indicates that millions of Zimbabweans will face serious food shortages later this year. These people are the poorest of the poor, the real victims of ZANU-PF's mismanagement and betrayal of the ideals of the Zimbabwean revolution of 1980.

Zimbabwe is caught in a spiral of governance crisis and economic collapse. We are deeply worried about its fate. We all know that Zimbabwe used to be the breadbasket of southern Africa; today it exports people instead of food and depends on remittances to pay for vital imports. It used to have one of the best health care systems in Africa; now Zimbabwean doctors and nurses are found all over the world, while public health is starting to fall apart at home. Zimbabwe is no longer an engine for regional trade and growth; instead, it is a drag on the region, scaring off foreign investors and burdening neighbors with refugees. Zimbabwe stands out as the outlier in a part of Africa that has seen massive improvements in governance and economic management in the last decade.

Considering the high stakes for the region, it was disappointing that the governments of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) failed to use more influence with Mugabe to guarantee the integrity of the

election. Unfortunately we were not surprised by SADC 's decision not to speak out forthrightly about the obvious flaws in the election. We are not able to agree with the South African Government's conclusion that the election results were a "credible reflection of the will" of the Zimbabwean people. This was an insult to the people of Zimbabwe.

At the same time, SADC influence may have played a key role in keeping the election largely free of violence, and we expect that SADC will continue to work for the restoration of democracy in Zimbabwe.

We were also encouraged that the African Union (AU) observer team called for an investigation of the irregularities that took place on election day. We hope that the AU will pursue this issue with the appropriate authorities in Zimbabwe.

U.S. Efforts to Promote Democracy, Health, and Food Security

As for the response of the United States, we are in the process of reviewing and updating our sanctions regime to ensure that our targeted sanctions have flexibility and teeth, and are adequate to the new situation. I can't give details about our review at this point. However, I can say that the election has reconfirmed the need for targeted financial and travel sanctions on regime leaders who undermine democracy. The individuals who abused democracy and helped to steal this election must be held accountable.

I do not want to have my words here distorted by Zimbabwean government propaganda. The United States has not and does not intend to impose general sanctions on Zimbabwe that will hurt the people or economy. We reject any steps that would cause ordinary Zimbabweans to suffer for the sins of the ZANU-PF leadership. That is not our policy.

On the contrary, we have responded generously to the humanitarian crises that have afflicted Zimbabwe and threatened the life of the country. We are the largest donor of assistance to fight the raging HIV/AIDS epidemic, which threatens to kill 25 percent of Zimbabwe's adult population. USAID and CDC recently launched one of Zimbabwe's first anti-retroviral programs. We provide desperately needed services to 100 thousand orphans and other children affected by HIV/AIDS.

We have also intervened to prevent mass famine. Since 2002, USAID has provided almost \$300 million of humanitarian assistance. During the food crisis of 2002-04, U.S. government assistance fed almost five million Zimbabweans. In spite of our political differences with the Government, we stand ready to assist the Zimbabwean people once again should food shortages materialize later this year. But we will not allow the government to direct or control the distribution of that food aid.

We also do important work to support Zimbabwe's democratic culture and civil society. We fund voter education programs, train election monitors, support medical and psychological help for torture victims, and help human rights activists. Our programs aim to keep open democratic space and support a human rights culture for the day when democracy is restored. The recent elections underscore the continuing need for democracy programs in Zimbabwe. Restoring democracy and prosperity in Zimbabwe are long-term problems that deserve support.

Our policy aims to empower and strengthen the Zimbabwean people. Concerned neighbors, compassionate donors, a critical press, and world leaders – all can and should play a role in giving more and technical supports to those in Zimbabwe who work for democracy. Ultimately, it is the Zimbabwean people themselves who will reclaim their freedoms, but our assistance can help to level the playing field and ensure that truth has a voice and all Zimbabweans can see there is an alternative to cronyism, intimidation, and fear.

