

**Testimony to the House Subcommittee on Africa,
Global Human Rights and International Operations**

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for inviting me to testify today. I request that my statement be submitted into the record in its entirety.

Today's hearings on Zimbabwe are particularly timely, and give us a valuable opportunity to discuss the challenges facing that country in the weeks and months following the recent elections. I would like to discuss the challenges facing the United States in its support for the growth of democratic institutions in Zimbabwe. My remarks will focus on the remarkable series of abuses and repressive measures President Robert Mugabe and his ruling ZANU-PF have initiated in recent years, the considerable progress made by Zimbabwe's opposition despite these abuses, and on the positive potential impact of increased United States support for a democratic future for Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe's recent elections highlight how far that country is from being a free and open multi-party democracy. While the weeks and months leading up to the election were marked by less violence and flagrant abuse than in previous elections in Zimbabwe, we cannot be lulled into the belief that the relative calm indicates strides toward free and fair elections, or a truly open political space. There are reports that the Zimbabwe Election Commission engaged in systematic voting fraud on a massive scale. And in the weeks since the election, groups and individuals who did take advantage of the seemingly normalized campaign and voting conditions prior to March 31 have already suffered reprisals. Now that credentialed media observers have been required to leave the country, their visas expired, the beatings and arrests are now returning to Zimbabwe, as are the spiraling consumer costs and increased inflation – ingredients in a recipe for a large-scale humanitarian crisis.

With or without election-day fraud itself, government measures prior to the election ensured the absence of a level playing field, and all but assured a ruling-party victory. A number of laws, including the notoriously repressive Public Order and Security Act, which limits public meetings and gatherings, and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), which bars independent media and access to state media, guaranteed that a fair election process could not occur. AIPPA provided for the formation of the Media and Information Commission, which is responsible for shutting down independent media groups, and registering and deporting journalists. The new electoral act then sanctioned implementation of a five-person electoral commission, each member chosen by President Mugabe. The electoral act also allowed for state-controlled voter education, military and civil servants acting as domestic observers, and an electoral

system vesting power in the Electoral Supervisory Commission – a commission whose greatest achievement was ironically last year’s abysmal voter registration drive.

Having first visited Zimbabwe in 1991 and having been closely involved in the election cycles there for close to fifteen years, I must acknowledge that the anti-democratic forces of Zimbabwe are continually growing more sophisticated. With memories of violence serving as a constant back-drop, non-violent forms of intimidation are increasingly effective. This election’s apparent decrease in physical intimidation should not be taken as an opening of political space, but rather a preconceived tactic by the government of Zimbabwe to create a façade of legitimate elections.

I will highlight a few of the blatant examples of intimidation and irregularities, covered in the press and related by my colleagues who directly witnessed the run-up and Election Day. Throughout the campaign season and concomitant drought, the government of Zimbabwe has used as a political tool the very food crisis whose existence it repeatedly denies – withholding food aid, controlling access to seeds and other agricultural inputs, and granting maize allotments only after seeing ruling party membership cards. One ZANU-PF parliament candidate who shall remain nameless told a rally that those who voted the right way would have plenty to eat after the election. A starving population seriously detracts from hopes for a free and fair national election.

Voter disenfranchisement is another major component in discrediting Zimbabwe’s recent elections. It is a matter of public record that more than 100,000 Zimbabwean voters were turned away at the polls on Election Day, despite valid registration. Furthermore, vast numerical discrepancies between the initial vote totals and the final reports more than suggest that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission halted the public announcement of results and bought the government time to convincingly reverse results that did not meet hoped-for outcomes. To give but one example, the Zimbabwe Election Commission initially announced that 14,812 votes had been cast in Manyame province, with more than 8,300 votes going to the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party. The government later announced that 24,303 votes had been cast in Manyame, a difference of nearly 9,500 votes, with ZANU-PF the declared winner.

Equally importantly, the government of Zimbabwe is trying to limit the capabilities of domestic organizations trying to promote human rights and democracy by depriving them of foreign contributions. It is not a violation of sovereignty to accept such support, which is allowed and even welcomed elsewhere, from the Republic of South Africa to Kenya and Nigeria. The United States and other foreign countries and entities have assisted Zimbabwean organizations that deal with HIV/AIDS education, agricultural development, parliamentary strengthening and other sectors with the full knowledge and endorsement of the Zimbabwean government. Nongovernmental organizations (NGO) that educate the public in human rights and democracy provide services to the people of Zimbabwe, just like their colleagues providing HIV/AIDS education. If the government of Zimbabwe limits organizations that promote human rights and democracy, then it is harming future funding for programs for HIV/AIDS, drought relief, foreign investment, and countless other efforts to improve the standard of living for all Zimbabweans.

Needless to say, conditions in Zimbabwe do not permit the International Republican Institute (IRI) nor any of our partners to work in Zimbabwe, as we have done in other countries throughout Africa. We have operated within very restricted environments, including a South Africa in transition from apartheid, the post-war states of Angola and Liberia, and a profoundly challenged Sudan, where we largely conduct trainings outside of the country. Late in 2004, the parliament of Zimbabwe passed legislation banning foreign funding for NGOs, which makes any IRI mission not only difficult, but illegal. Despite these obstacles to democratic support systems in Zimbabwe, and to the surprise of many non-Africanists, our U.S. Embassy and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission in Harare, Zimbabwe remain open. Despite the impending ban on foreign assistance to domestic NGOs and years of methodical pressure by the Zimbabwean government, democratic hopes persist and the U.S. is dogged – for good reason. With an infusion of U.S. government support, Zimbabwe’s prospects for being removed from the world’s list of ‘Outposts of Tyranny’ are good – arguably better than the other dictatorships on Secretary of State Rice’s now-famous list.

The fact is that if IRI, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), and the U.S. government, along with the United Nations and our African counterparts such as the South African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union, fail to devote ample resources in support of democratic forces in Zimbabwe, then prospects are bad. Present deplorable conditions on the ground would likely worsen as the regime is able to freely enact constitutional changes to enshrine not only President Mugabe, but generations of his successors. Support from neighbors, however, when bolstered by U.S. government involvement, would significantly strengthen Zimbabwe’s democratic prospects. We have seen the effects of quiet diplomacy over the past few years, and most recently during these elections and the likelihood for Zimbabwe democratizing under the guidance of quiet diplomacy are not good. Like Togo, Liberia, and Côte d’Ivoire, Zimbabwe should benefit from megaphone diplomacy – diplomacy that does not allow fellow African leaders free reign in managing elections that fly in the face of the SADC’s own Mauritius Protocol and similar international standards.

During the past 10 years, IRI has assisted democratic forces to strengthen their institutions and capacity. Our goal in Zimbabwe, like our goal in Ukraine, Iraq, Indonesia, and the many other IRI program countries, is to support growth of political and economic freedom, good governance and human rights by educating people, parties, non-governmental organizations, and governments on the values and practices of democracy. IRI has tried to do just that in Zimbabwe by working from afar. But the greatest work has been done by Zimbabweans themselves. For all IRI and other organizations like it do, it is the people of Zimbabwe and those courageous enough to challenge the anti-democratic forces who need to be supported. In many ways, they are dependent upon support from the United States, the United Nations, the African Union, and others to continue the struggle for democracy in Zimbabwe.

This struggle is not a dying dream. As much as Zimbabwe has slid back, it has also made many advances. We should not take the disheartening outcome of the recent elections as

an excuse to give up, but as an indication that it is now time to ramp up American support for democratic institutions in Zimbabwe. The MDC, is seen as a credible and viable political party in Zimbabwe, even by President Mugabe. The MDC has successfully participated in two parliamentary elections and a presidential election, despite tremendous pressure. Despite the laws limiting meetings and publicity, the MDC has not only survived, but grown, building a grassroots movement capable of bringing tens of thousands to its rallies and forcing the Zimbabwean government to recognize it as a significant political player on the landscape of Zimbabwe. The MDC campaigned in more places than ever before, and it is clear that the party enjoys public support. It is highly regarded by regional powers. In fact, after MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai was acquitted of treason charges in October 2004, he met with the leaders of South Africa, Mauritius, Botswana, Nigeria, and Ghana, to name only a few.

Despite this growing international recognition, Zimbabwe's neighbors have not done all that they could. While South Africa's African National Congress party was surprisingly critical of Mugabe's government in mid-January, initially bringing meaningful pressure to bear on Zimbabwe, outcry has dissipated in recent months. While a spokeswoman for SADC admitted that "The results that the candidates themselves signed at the polling stations were not the same as the results announced on national television," South African President Thabo Mbeki called Zimbabwe's elections "free and fair," even before the election occurred. The SADC team declared the election "peaceful, credible and dignified." These inconsistencies are troubling, and those relying on observer reports are left to wonder whether the will of the Zimbabwean people played into the election at all.

While I hope influential neighbors, including South Africa, will speak out against the recurring travesty of rigged elections, I hope, too, that Robert Mugabe will think of his own legacy and begin to take pause.

His rule over Zimbabwe, first as prime minister, and now as president, has been a period of innumerable missed opportunities. Mugabe himself spent a decade in prison, and years at the head of an armed rebel movement, touted as one of Africa's liberating sons. But now, at the end of his life, will he be remembered for these early triumphs? In the early 1980s, Zimbabwe was an African bread-basket, a model of agricultural development. Today, Zimbabwe has descended into year after year of food crisis. Its economy is wrecked, and its farms are abandoned. Millions depend on handouts, and inflation accelerates at a disastrous pace. Prices have continued to sky-rocket even in the short time since the elections, and fuel shortages have grown even worse as well. All of Zimbabwe's tremendous potential has been jeopardized, but could be salvaged if Mugabe and the ruling party were to allow legitimate elections to take place and implement substantive democratic reforms.

In light of Zimbabwe's potential, the need for a clear U.S. government policy and plan for Zimbabwe is evident. The recent renewal of the U.S. travel ban on Mugabe and other high-ranking officials from Zimbabwe sends a clear message of disapproval of the games being played by Zimbabwe's leadership – but it does little to help the people at the grassroots, clamoring to be heard. While President Mugabe may vacation in Malaysia

and even have a seat at Pope John Paul II's funeral in Vatican City, his people continue to suffer. Only sustained and high-level U.S. government support for the growth of democratic institutions in Zimbabwe will be effective in the long run.

Some hopeful observers have asked why Zimbabwe has not given us a popular revolution reminiscent of democracy's recent victory in the Ukraine. This is a false analogy that prevents us from seeing the successes that have occurred. The political environment in Zimbabwe is completely different than the Ukraine, which allowed for much more political space, and saw more than a decade of sustained programming by IRI, NDI, IFES, Freedom House, and numerous other organizations promoting democratic growth from the grassroots to the highest levels of power. The people of Zimbabwe are much poorer. They are hungry and beleaguered; they have faced a total information blackout, and for years have suffered widespread intimidation and violence, including reprisals in areas where opposition support is high. But civil society organizations promoting democratic values have survived in spite of the obstacles.

Clearly, Zimbabwe is not yet ready for a Ukrainian-style popular revolution. But the mere sustenance of democratic forces in that country has been a victory, a victory that can be extended through continued support from the international community led by the African Union, the United States, and the United Nations. Without it, the ability of Zimbabwe's valiant activists to continue their fight for democracy will wither.

All too often, Americans pay attention to Africa only when the headlines tell of violence and atrocity. Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, and Liberia have all garnered this sort of negative publicity in recent months. In the case of the Sudan in particular, the United States has led the way, pledging crucial sums of aid to assist in that country's reconciliation between the north and the south. The fact that Zimbabwe is not currently making the same sort of headlines does not give us an excuse for inaction.

We need only look at other regional examples, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to realize how vital it is that Zimbabwe's situation not grow worse. The country's economic problems have given rise to refugees departing for South Africa; workers from Malawi and Mozambique, once in demand in Zimbabwe, now have to look elsewhere. Zimbabwe, once an anchor for regional food security, is now a drain on regional resources. Zimbabwe's status as a pariah state undermines regional stability. It hurts efforts by regional organizations like the African Union and the SADC to strengthen regional democratic governance and economic development.

A few brief words in summary about how the U.S. government should proceed from here.

- 1) Encourage our friends in southern Africa to be honest about the situation in Zimbabwe and to pressure Mugabe's government to adhere to SADC election protocols in the future.
- 2) Work with regional organizations like SADC and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), to strengthen their own systems of peer review, to find a genuinely African solution to Zimbabwe's difficulties.

3) Ramp up our support for NGOs and civil society organizations to encourage growth of a democratic culture in Zimbabwe.

Continued and increasing levels of U.S. government support for democracy-building programs is the best way to open political space in Zimbabwe, to stave off a growing strategic threat, and to ensure that the prospects for democracy in Zimbabwe get better, not worse.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.