

Zimbabwe water plentiful, but not fit to drink

By Nicole C. Lee

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The level of frustration is at an all-time high. Zimbabwe has been the topic of international discussion for most of the year. The power sharing agreement between Robert Mugabe's party, ZANU-PF, and Morgan Tsvangirai's party, Movement for Democratic Change, have not resolved the crisis in Zimbabwe.

The needed economic and political reforms that would impact people's daily lives have not been implemented. With inflation already over 11 million percent and the authorization of the use of foreign currency as legal tender, the international financial crisis finishing off what little is left of the economy.

The country that was once called the "breadbasket of Africa" cannot feed most of its population. Zimbabwean trade unions and civil society groups continue to be either ignored or targeted for persecution. And now, cholera.

Women of Zimbabwe Arise has issued a communication describing the conditions that affect a huge number of Zimbabweans. It is filled with statistics that tie my stomach in knots — 20 percent of those surveyed re-

ported that cholera or similar infections had affected their families. The death toll is almost 800 with the possibility of anywhere between 16,000 to 50,000 victims before it's all over. As starving Zimbabweans flee to neighboring countries, the cholera epidemic is spreading as cases are reported in South Africa and Botswana.

Cholera is a preventable illness, transmitted in conditions of poor sanitation via contaminated water.

It spreads easily where sewage systems are not functioning, or where raw sewage is present. Zimbabwe's infrastructure was once strong enough to prevent, or at least minimize people's exposure to cholera bacteria, but failing sewer systems and broken water purification plants are making the outbreak of cholera almost unavoidable.

Over the past few months, and arguably the past few years, the infrastructure in Zimbabwe has broken down to a point that declaring an emergency is a gross understatement. Colleagues on the ground have reported



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that recent heavy rains are carrying raw sewage from broken and overflowing sewers into people's homes. Into their homes. Human and animal waste is flooding the same floor where their children walk and play.

For months, many of us have tried to draw attention to the worsening crisis. Disappearances, arrests and detentions of human rights activists, a massive food crisis, and mass exodus of refugees into neighboring Southern African nations have been crippling.

We have begged for the citizens of Zimbabwe to be respected, for their voices to be heard, and for their daily struggles to be recognized as what they are — a massive violation of human rights.

Civil society in Zimbabwe report that the government has been neglecting the infrastructure, including the failing water treatment systems, for years. Healthcare is virtually non-existent. Zimbabweans have no food. They are fleeing across the border into South Africa looking for any kind of relief

for themselves and their families.

Cholera, however is just a symptom of a country that has been broken by internal and external strongmen. The international community makes threats and yet refuses to own their role in the political breakdown in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwean government blames its own failings on the failings of its "enemies." None of these perpetrators behave as if human life or dignity is a priority over their petty power plays. Indeed, they fight each other as each day the situation becomes more grave.

The government of Zimbabwe owes their people the cornerstones of democracy and economic justice. The U.S., the UK and the international community must own up to the present-day vestiges of an imperialistic past and put the needs of Zimbabweans first. The people of Zimbabwe have suffered long enough. Their voices have been muffled by the whines of leaders who have proven their own cowardice and obscurity.

It is time that we stand up and speak out for the people of Zimbabwe and not sit down or shut up until their demands are met.

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Big 3 automakers held to unfair double-standard

By George E. Curry

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Nothing has been more interesting to watch in recent months than the contrast between the way Congress has treated the Big Three U.S. auto manufacturers seeking a bridge loan to keep their troubled industry afloat and the overly generous handouts used to reward Wall Street greed.

Considering the different constituents, one would have thought the most hostility would have been directed at the fat cats on Wall Street, many of whom profited by betting that some mortgage-backed investments would go belly up. But that hasn't been the case.

When CEOs of General Motors, Ford and Chrysler flew to Washington on corporate jets to make a plea for help, windbags in Congress stepped over one another trying to express the most outrage. Never mind that some of those legislators have themselves flown on corporate jets, never mind that they have traveled free on military jets, never mind that they enjoy health benefits and other perks far

beyond the reach of most Americans. It was the equivalent of Jesse James complaining about the crimes of Frank James.

Whether you believe that the U.S. auto industry should receive a loan or feel they should be forced into bankruptcy in order to reorganize, it should be noted that car manufacturers and Wall Street were seeking two markedly different forms of federal assistance. The Big Three were asking for a loan while Wall Street was seeking — and got — a handout.

The Bush administration, after being given a \$700 billion pot to pretty much spend as it wants, has evidently adopted the motto: No Bank Left Behind. Take the case of Citigroup, Inc. It recently received a \$20 billion infusion of cash from the feds and a guarantee of \$306 billion against its high-risk assets. That's on top of a previous \$25 bil-



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lion the federal government had doled out to Citigroup. In exchange, the federal government will receive preferred stock shares with an 8 percent dividend.

We're in the middle of providing nearly \$1 trillion to Wall Street, yet no one has talked about Wall Street executives' use of corporate jets, or their coming up with an ac-

ceptable plan before receiving the money or removing the inept leaders that plunged the industry into this morass.

The heated debate over helping the U.S. auto industry has not been advanced by sloppy news reporting.

As Media Matters, the watchdog group, notes: "Several media outlets have used data that combines the average cost of current wages and benefits and future benefits to falsely assert or suggest that autoworkers make \$70 or more per hour. But, as analysts and some media outlets have noted, the figure includes not only future retirement benefits for current workers, but also benefits paid to current retirees."

Dean Baker, co-director of Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, wrote on his blog, "The *New York Times* told readers that GM's autoworkers are paid \$70 an hour (including healthcare and pension). This is not true. The base pay is about \$28 an hour. If healthcare cost per worker average \$12,000 per year, that adds in another \$6 an hour. If the pension payment takes up 25 percent of base pay (an extremely high pension), that gets you another \$7 an hour, bringing the total to \$41 an hour. That's decent pay, but still a long way from \$70 an hour."

Most of those opposed to helping the Big Three supported the Wall Street bailout plan.

That's the same group that railed against welfare for the needy but voted to support corporate welfare for the greedy.

Republican lawmakers have strongly objected to granting a loan to U.S. carmakers. Senators Richard Shelby of Alabama and Bob Corker of Tennessee have been helping lead that effort.

While they oppose loans to Detroit, they didn't object to taxpayers in their respective states subsidizing foreign automakers. According to Good Jobs First, a non-profit group that monitors corporate subsidies, more than \$3.5 billion has been used to subsidize foreign manufacturers that built plants in the U.S.

Alabama, for example, used \$258 million to subsidize the Mercedes-Benz plant in Vance., \$252 million to support Hyundai in Montgomery, \$248 million help Honda in Lincoln and \$30 million to assist Toyota in Huntsville.

Corker, the former mayor of Chattanooga, Tenn., neglected to point out that Tennessee gave up \$577 million in subsidies to encourage Volkswagen to build a plant in his hometown and \$233 million to Nissan in Smyrna and another \$200 million to them in Decherd, Tenn.

"As elected officials debate aid for the Big Three, taxpayers have the right to know the full extent of government involvement in America's auto industry," said Greg LeRoy, executive director of Good Jobs First.

"And while proposed federal aid to the Big Three would take the form of a loan, the vast majority of subsidies to foreign auto plants were taxpayer gifts such as property and sales tax exemptions, income tax credits, infrastructure aid, land discounts, and training grants."

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erations.

The National Black Chamber of Commerce has encouraged more than a few of its members and affiliates to report the scum as they appear before them. The Federal Bureau of Investigation has a very user friendly program known as the "Public Corruption Hotline." When someone tries to shake you down using their elected office, simply call the local hotline number.

If you go to www.fbi.gov and search "Public Corruption Hotline" the appropriate phone number for your location will appear. Call it and bust the scum. We have found it quite effective in places like Chicago, Detroit, New Orleans, D.C., etc. This is what we need to

do! Currently, the mayor of Detroit, mayor of Birmingham, congressmen from New Orleans, San Diego, Youngstown, governor of Illinois, on and on are just small examples of the massive corruption that goes on within our precious democratic system.

We need to step forward and say "NO MORE." Let us put the crooks in jail and send a warning to would-be, weak-minded leaders that a new day has come and you can no longer taint our political system.

Our democracy depends on it and the future of our children and grandchildren depend on us to be vigilant. YES WE CAN!

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