

2009

ZIMBABWE IN PICTURES



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In Search of a Different Africa

EDITION 16



Chris Kabwato
Publisher

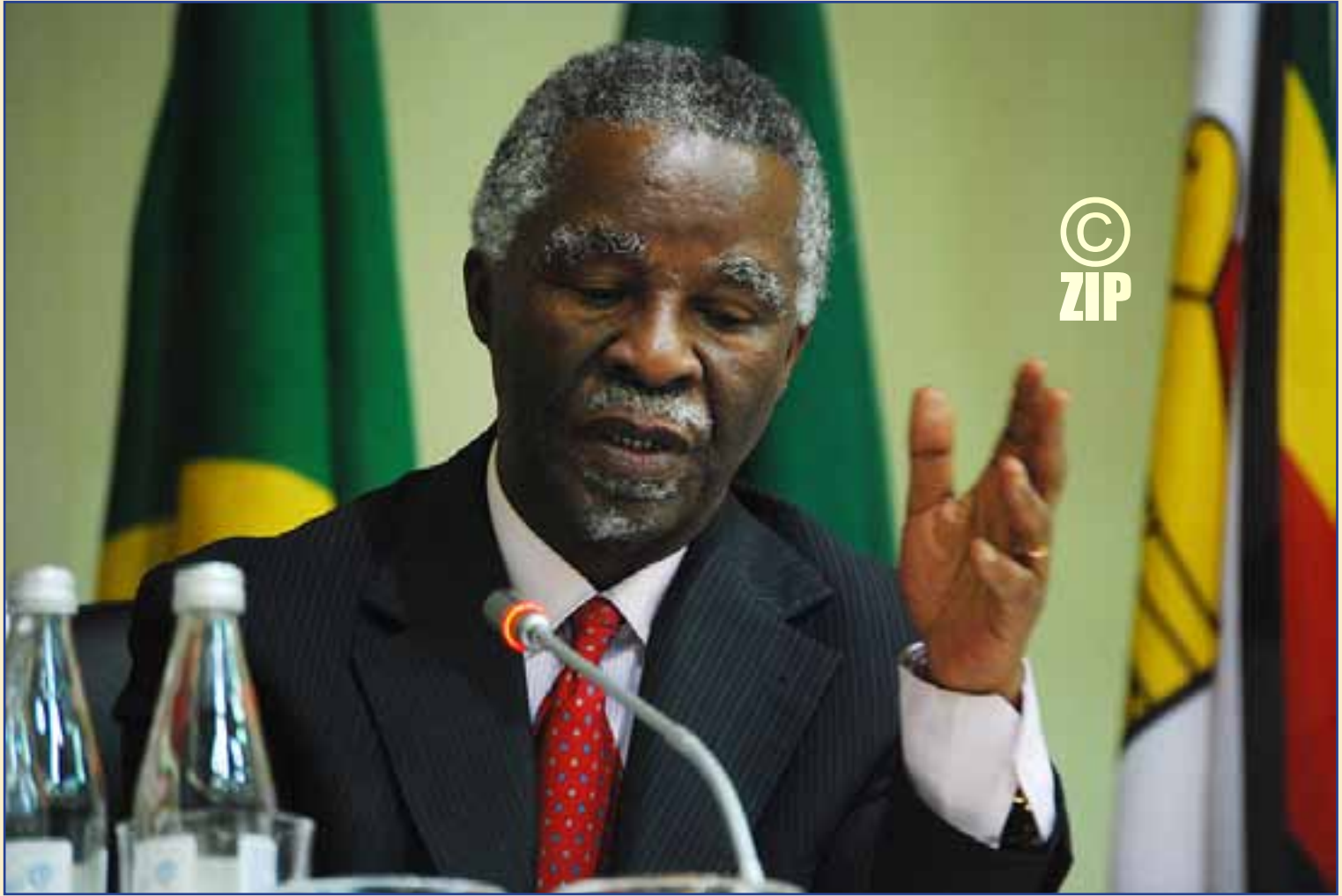
In Search of a Different Africa

It could be Pliny the Roman scholar who died in AD79 who threw the curse at our continent when he observed – “There is always something new coming out of Africa”. We are one damn crazy joke. One big tragic joke. The something new in Africa started in Kenya where it was resolved that if you beat the opposition into submission you then form a unity government where real power remains with the incumbent. Now when you have done that in Kenya why not then gravitate southward and reward the magnificent efforts of one Comrade Robert Gabriel Mugabe with the same solution. So this is democracy? At the time when we were celebrating two developments one international and the other continental – Barack Obama’s inauguration and the Ghana elections – the spineless and morally-bankrupt leaders of Southern African countries – chose to appease one of their own. No, Pliny was wrong. Africa does not surprise. It continues to betray its own with such boring predictability.

But it can’t continue like this. Africans will have to demand better than this perpetual tragedy. The youth that I meet on the streets of Harare, Dakar, Johannesburg etc want a different Africa. They see a leader like Barack Obama and wonder why our leaders cannot be driven by the same value – the value of true public service. The political office is not a gravy train. It is an office to serve.

As Zimbabwe in Pictures comes back into 2009 stronger and more focused the theme of public service and accountability will be a strong feature of our work and our values. So a very tepid welcome to the strange creature that SADC has foisted on us but a warning to Mugabe and his henchmen that the people will no longer sit by and see you continue to fulfill Pliny’s prophecy.

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MUGABE'S CENTRAL BANKER

I See the World Crying

Gono says he feels 'vindicated' by God, now that the U.S. has been forced to print money, too.

GIDEON GONO HAS BEEN AT THE center of Zimbabwe's economic decline since he was appointed governor of the country's reserve bank in 2003. A ZANU-PF insider and by many accounts President Robert Mugabe's right-hand man, Gono generally keeps himself shielded from the foreign press, fortifying himself in luxury hotels or his 47-bedroom mansion in Harare. He is known in some circles as Mr. Inflation because of his penchant for printing money—most recently Zimbabwe's trillion-dollar bill, to be launched later this year—but he's more than a central banker. He is thought to have had a hand in many controversial government ventures, such as rewarding party loyalists with land and downplaying the cholera epidemic. He talked with *NEWSWEEK's* Alaina Varvaloucas and Jerry Guo in Johannesburg. Excerpts:

NEWSWEEK: A lot of people have blamed you for Zimbabwe's economic collapse.

GONO: The West wants you to think it's because of mismanagement. But sanctions have had a devastating effect on the country. I cannot think of any genocide that is worse than that. By their very nature, sanctions are supposed to induce fear. It's like terrorism. It's callous.

The United States maintains that the sanctions are aimed at Mugabe's inner circle. They do have an impact [on me] but it's

not like I'm an international persona non grata; I often travel. Contrary to what the world has been made to believe, the sanctions are not really hitting the middle- to high-income brackets. The impact of sanctions is to deny the country access to credit facilities, and then we are unable to import fuel. Then the poor suffer.

The global economy is also going through a credit crunch. What do you think of that? I sit back and see the world today crying over the recent credit crunch, becoming hysterical about something which has not even lasted a year. I have been living with it for 10 years. My country has had to go for the past decade without credit.

Your critics blame your monetary policies. To ensure that my people survive, I had to print money. I found myself doing extraordinary things that aren't in the textbooks. Then the IMF asked the U.S. to please print money. The whole world is now practicing what they have been saying I should not. I decided that God had been on my side and had come to vindicate me.

Do you feel optimistic about Barack Obama? I don't want anyone to put unnecessary pressure on Obama and hold him to supernatural powers. He's coming into a situation that is untenable already. By the same standards, I don't like anybody saying if President Mugabe was to go tomorrow, the fortunes of Zimbabweans will change for the better, as if he is personally liable for our situation.

TRILLION-DOLLAR MAN: Zimbabwe's Gono

Wouldn't sanctions be lifted if he let go of power?

[Laughs] The sanctions will not be lifted because Mugabe leaves office. It is not about Mugabe.

How so?

[The West] will not admit the sanctions are political. There are other countries with serious human-rights shortfalls, but you find [Western] investors going there. **Would you do anything differently if you had the last five years to do over again?**

There are certain policies with the benefit of hindsight where we could've managed our affairs better. I don't want to leave you with an impression that Gono or Mugabe are direct descendants of Saint John or Saint Paul. There is a very high level of indiscipline and corruption in the Zimbabwean economy. I would enact tougher legislation that would ensure offenders would never do it again, and invest more in educating the critics of our land-reform programs. We were outwitted in the propaganda war. We didn't explain to the world how our war of liberation came about.

Is it time to change course then?

Only a fool does not change course when it is necessary.

In November you shut down Zimbabwe's stock exchange. Will you open it again?

Unless there is more discipline and honor, the exchange will stay closed. I can't be bothered. I don't know when it will open.

Many people have called the government's handling of the cholera epidemic a crime.

Cholera is under control. Every year there is a cholera outbreak in southern Africa; the epicenter of the disease just happened to be in Zimbabwe this year.

Do you view your term as a success?

I am modestly credited with the survival strategy of my country. The issue is if you want to break Zimbabwe and want it to fail, just deal with one man. You deal with Gideon Gono.

That sounds a bit egotistical.

I owe a lot of my character and who I am today from a humble background. I was poor. I got my start making tea and keeping house. I'm a normal guy; I miss going to the supermarket.

What do you think of your many critics?

No other [central bank] governor has had to deal with the kind of inflation levels that I deal with. [The people at] my bank [are] at the cutting edge of the country.

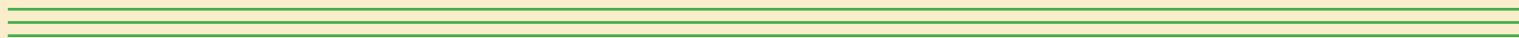
Will 2009 bring improvement or disaster?

It's got to be a good year. What keeps me bright and looking forward to every day is that it can't be any worse.



The ZIP team wishes to thank:

Babah Tarawally and Hans Determeyer of FreeVoice for their ongoing support for the Zimbabwe in Pictures Project





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