

STOP PRESS

FAMINE IN ZIMBABWE

President Mugabe announced on Friday 5 February 2016 that Zimbabwe faced a Drought Disaster with up to 2.4m people already in need of food aid. So far this year the rainfall in much of the southern part of the country has been minimal due to the El Nino Effect. Cattle are dying throughout Matabeleland due to lack of food and water and, in most areas, farmers have not even begun to put in their seeds for the 2016 harvest because the ground is too dry.



The current year's prospects come on top of a grain harvest in 2015 (which totalled close to 850,000 tonnes in the country as a whole) that was only 50% of that in 2014 (1,750,000 tonnes) because of poor rains and reduced plantings. This means that there must be a shortfall of some 900,000 tonnes and if famine is to be avoided before the 2016 harvest is brought in during May, this quantity of grain must be sourced from other countries. Efforts were made, principally by private traders, to import maize from Zambia in 2015 but the total brought in up to the end of October was less than 500,000 tonnes – and then Zambia banned further exports – meaning that there was certain to be a sizeable shortfall in Zimbabwe over the lean months of January to April 2016. Now the problems are multiplied because of the appalling prospects for the 2016 harvest which, according to local experts, is expected to be only 200,000 tonnes. The total national grain consumption is of the order of 1,800,000 tonnes per annum. Though widespread famine is expected, the effects will be most seriously felt in the 'Dryveld', Matabeleland and Masvingo, where next to no grain will be brought in.

So what is happening to our brethren in Matabeleland?

Pastor Albert wrote at the end of January:

'The food situation in Matabeleland is very critical. First there was no meaningful rain last season and this season people have not even had enough rain to plant. So people are very hungry and livestock is dying. People are talking about dying. If we put mealie meal on the bus like we have always done it no longer reaches the destination because hungry people steal from the bus. Today the pastor from Binga is coming so he can travel with the mealie meal and make sure it is not stolen.'

David Coltart, a human rights lawyer and former Minister of Education in the MDC/Zanu-PF power-sharing government, wrote on 21 January quoting a report he had just received:

'I was out doing a rural school visit in Nyamandlovu (45km north-west of Bulawayo) last week, the situation is just dire. One child collapsed on the road to school, hunger. The poor head is beside himself. He spoke about how many of the children are coming to him during the day, complaining of aching bellies, the only advice he can give is to drink water. In a school that has no resources, where the fence posts to their nutrition garden were burnt in a bush fire allowing the goats to come in and eat everything, where teachers cannot afford to support their own families, what can the school do? These children are doomed never to reach potential as their nutritional condition is affecting their intellectual development. It is a cruel and tragic time in Zimbabwe.'

Can ZVSF make any difference? The frank answer is – not very much. But we read that, so far, the Zanu-PF Government has done next to nothing in Matabeleland – its priority seems to be the celebration of

Mugabe's 92nd Birthday at the end of February and, in any case, they did not have sufficient funds to pay their civil servants' December salaries until January 2016. So - what should we do in the face of Christ's encouragement to us 'to feed the hungry' (Matthew 25 v 35)? We have to respond to the desperate need – both with our hearts and out of our pockets!

February 2016

<p>Bank details</p> <p>Bank: CAF Bank Ltd Account name: Zimbabwe Victims' Support Fund Sort Code: 40-52-40 Account No: 00022807</p>	<p>Online giving via our website</p> <p>www.zimbabwevictimssupportfund.org/supportus.html Online Donations</p>  <p>The logo for 'giveall2charity' is enclosed in a rounded rectangular border. It features the text 'giveall2charity' in a sans-serif font, with 'give' in grey, 'all' in orange, and '2charity' in orange. A small 'ga' icon is positioned to the right of the text. Below the main text is the tagline 'going where giving should' in a smaller, grey font.</p>
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