

BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

**A window on the situation
of Zimbabweans living in Gauteng**

**A Report by the
Zimbabwe Torture Victims Project**

September 2005

Healing Survivors
A Project of **idasa**

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Introduction

The evolving and inter-related social, economic and political crises in Zimbabwe have contributed to an unprecedented exodus of Zimbabweans from all backgrounds away from their home country. The majority of Zimbabweans are in South Africa, Botswana and the United Kingdom, with most believed to be in South Africa.

Exactly how many have left the country and for what reason remains unclear, and there is only limited empirical evidence, with much of this focused on the 'brain drain', as skilled Zimbabweans seek alternatives in the context of economic collapse and repressive authoritarian nationalism. Increasingly, many unskilled Zimbabweans are also on the move in a desperate bid to escape a deteriorating situation that appears to have no end in sight. In 2004, one senior official involved in the Zimbabwean government's 'Homelink' initiative that aimed at facilitating remittances of foreign exchange from the growing diaspora, estimated that between 60% to 70% of Zimbabwe's economically active population had left the country.

Background

The Zimbabwe Torture Victims Project (ZTVP) was established in January 2005, to address growing concerns that many Zimbabweans who had left the country were victims of organized violence and torture (OVT), and as such were in need of medical and psycho-social assistance.¹ Zimbabwean human rights organisations have recorded several thousand cases of OVT relating to incidents that have occurred since 2000.

To date, the ZTVP has provided assistance to over 120 victims / survivors of organised violence torture from Zimbabwe. The Project wanted to develop a clearer sense of how many potential clients they might have to deal with, and as such, wanted to get an impression of what proportion of Zimbabweans currently living in Gauteng might potentially qualify in terms of need.

Methodology

The ZTVP conducted a 'snap' survey of 236 Zimbabweans in 5 different locations of Gauteng during July and early August 2005. None of those interviewed were or are clients of the ZTVP or the related 'Tree of Life' healing programme. A snowballing interview technique was adopted, although efforts were made not to concentrate more than 2 interviews in any one particular domicile. Many (actual and potential) respondents were reluctant to participate, suspicious of the motives of the interviewers, and uncomfortable to disclose information that they felt might be used 'against them'. For this,

¹ There is considerable evidence from within Zimbabwe that there are many victims of organised violence and torture, and not only from the present crisis. Here see the reports of the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum [www.hrforumzim.co.zw], where there are 47 monthly reports since July 2001, and 22 more analytical reports on aspects of human rights violations in Zimbabwe.

and other reasons, some respondents were unwilling or unable to answer specific questions.

Scientifically, the results below cannot be extrapolated to represent the broader Zimbabwean diaspora. In other words, the findings are not representative of all Zimbabweans living in Gauteng. They are, however, indicative of particular trends and conditions and do provide an important window into aspects of the current context in which many Zimbabweans now find themselves.

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TOPLINE RESULTS

(a) Demographics

- 236 interviews were conducted
- 141 respondents were male, 91 were female
- 139 respondents were single, 95 were married (2 'no responses')
- 29 was the average age of male respondents, 27 the average age of female respondents.
- 156 respondents said that they had one or more children

(b) From where in Zimbabwe?

We asked respondents which provinces they had come from in Zimbabwe. Of those that responded;

	Male	Female	Total
Matabeleland North	18	11	29
Matabeleland South	27	23	50
Bulawayo	18	22	40
Midlands	17	7	24
Masvingo	36	11	47
Manicaland	15	7	23
Harare	8	5	13
Mashonaland East	2	1	3
Mashonaland Central	1	1	2
Mashonaland West	2	0	2

Just over 50% of our sample comes from Matabeleland, the heartland of political opposition to the ruling party. Conversely, just under 3% hail from Mashonaland, the nucleus of ZANU-PF support.

(c) How long in South Africa?

We asked respondents when had they come to South Africa?

1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
2	-	-	1	3	2	1	2	-	-	5

1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
2	4	3	9	12	23	29	42	41	51

85% of the sample had come to South Africa, from Zimbabwe since 2000, conventionally marked as the start of the critical decline in both the human rights and economic climate in Zimbabwe. The situation in Zimbabwe has steadily deteriorated with over 20% of the total sample leaving the country in the first seven months of 2005.

(d) Legal Status

We asked respondents whether they were legally in South Africa, and if so, what permits did they have:

- Approximately 20% (47) of the respondents said they had valid permits to be in South Africa.
- Of these, 39 had either asylum application or refugee permits (i.e. 16,5% of total sample)
- 10 of the 34 respondents who had come to RSA between 1985 and 1999 had legal permits.
- 37 of the 198 respondents who came to RSA between 2000 and 2005 had legal permits

80% of the respondents do not have legal permits. 68% of these are Zimbabweans who have come to South Africa since 2000. Over three quarters of those that did have permits said that they were in possession of either asylum application or refugee permits.

(e) Reasons for Leaving Zimbabwe

Obviously, people's reasons for relocation are often complex and based on a variety of factors. We asked respondents what was the main reason they had left Zimbabwe to live in South Africa

Reasons for leaving Zimbabwe	M	F	Total
Political reasons (incl. violence, intimidation etc)	58	21	79
Economic reasons (unemployment, poverty, lack of food etc)	77	54	131
Other (student, personal etc)	8	8	16

56% of respondents said they had come to South Africa primarily because of the economic situation in Zimbabwe, whilst a third of the sample claimed it was for political reasons.

The relationship between economic and political factors needs to be explored in more detail to assist us in understanding how these issues relate (i.e. people who have lost their jobs as a direct result of their political involvement, or against a backdrop of political reaction). (See below)

(f) Victims of Organised Violence and Torture

We asked respondents whether they had ever been **direct victims of violence and / or torture**, and / whether they had been threatened / intimidated by members / supporters of a political party, or the security forces, war veterans or the youth militia?

- **70 respondents (30%) said they had been direct victims of violence / torture**
- Of these, 54 were men and 16 were women
- **A further 47 respondents said that they had been threatened or intimidated.**

It is important to note that we did not ask when they had been victims of violence, but given the average age of respondents as being in their late 20s, it is safe to assume that, in most cases, this happened in the period of independence (i.e. after 1980s), and most likely within the last five and a half years. This would accord with the overwhelming empirical evidence of such abuses that has been collected by human rights organizations in Zimbabwe during this period

All respondents who said that they were direct victims of violence were administered a psychiatric screening instrument, the SRQ-8 (A 'Self Reporting Questionnaire' with 8 questions). This instrument is used to determine the presence of clinically significant psychological disorder, and has been widely used in Zimbabwe. The instrument was originally developed and validated in Zimbabwe.

33 of the 70 [47%] respondents who said they were direct victims of OVT, had an SRQ score < 4. This gave a simple point-prevalence rate of 14%, which is significantly lower in comparison to other Zimbabwean studies involving displaced persons.² Nevertheless, it remains indicative that large numbers of Zimbabweans currently residing in South Africa require psychosocial assistance.

² A study by the Amani Trust conducted on displaced commercial farmworkers, using the same instrument, the SRQ-8, found an 81% point prevalence rate for psychological disorder. See *AMANI (2002), Preliminary Report of a Survey on Internally Displaced Persons from Commercial Farms in Zimbabwe, HARARE: ZIMBABWE.*

Victims of OVT, reasons for leaving Zimbabwe \ legal status in RSA

In terms of those respondents who said they had been direct victims of violence &/or torture;

- 55 of these 70 said they left Zimbabwe primarily for political reasons (15 for economic reasons)
- Only 11 of these 70 (i.e. 16%) had valid permits to be in South Africa

Although it is estimated that as many as 10,000 Zimbabweans have now managed to access South Africa's asylum process, ZTVP believe that many more may be eligible in terms of South Africa's domestic and international legal obligations. The experience of most of the Project's clients' has been a litany of failed attempts to access the asylum process. ZTVP is currently working closely with Lawyers for Human Rights on legal action to force the Department of Home Affairs to supply adequate relief in this regard.

As we can see from above, the vast majority of people who might be considered as 'most eligible' for securing asylum applications (i.e. they have left as a result of violence / political reasons) have either been unable or (possibly) unwilling to secure these permits. This accords with ZTVP's experiences of its client base.

As we can also see, 39 respondents (16,5% of sample) said they had secured asylum application / refugee permits. Of these, 28 (i.e. over two thirds) did not cite political reasons as the primary reason for leaving Zimbabwe. Presumably therefore, they came to South Africa primarily for economic or other reasons. Does this then disqualify them from applying for asylum? In some cases, probably – and this would accord with the view that a number of asylum applications are indeed in the words of the Department of Home Affairs, 'manifestly unfounded'.

So, are these people refugees or economic migrants? The situation is by no means clear-cut, especially as South Africa's refugee legislation incorporates the African Union definition of refugee, which allows for the consideration of refugee status for persons fleeing from "events seriously disturbing or disrupting public order in either a part or the whole of his or her country"³- a situation that many would argue has characterized the contemporary circumstances that many Zimbabweans now find themselves in, and undoubtedly complicated by the impact of Operation Murambatsvina.⁴

³ Chapter 1, Section 3(b), Refugee Act, No.130 of 1998.

⁴ According to the United Nations, between May and mid July 2005, an estimated 700,000 people had their homes destroyed, and 2,4 million people were affected in some degree by the Zimbabwean government's efforts to eradicate the informal sector (business and homes) in Zimbabwe's (primarily) urban conurbations, ostensibly under the guise of 'restoring law and order'. – See **Report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Zimbabwe to assess the Scope and Impact of Operation Murambatsvina** by the UN Special Envoy on Human Settlements Issues In Zimbabwe, Mrs. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka

(g) Politicisation of food

The debate around the political control and manipulation of food in Zimbabwe remains highly contested. We asked respondents whether they had ever been refused access to food assistance in Zimbabwe

- **105 respondents (44%) said they had been refused access to food.**
- 50 of these said they left Zimbabwe for economic reasons, 48 for political reasons and 7 for other reasons.

Those who claimed that they had experience of food being refused came from the following provinces

Matabeleland North	15
Matabeleland South	20
Bulawayo	22
Midlands	11
Masvingo	24
Manicaland	5
Harare	7

(h) Employment background

We asked respondents what work they were doing before they left Zimbabwe. (We did not ask whether or not they were employed at the time they left Zimbabwe, but wanted to know whether they had been working sometime in the recent past)

- 146 (approx 62%) of respondents said they had been working in Zimbabwe
- 74 (approx 30%) of the respondents had been unemployed.

Respondents provided detail on a wide variety of employment backgrounds, skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled, working in both state and private sectors. This included 4 former members of the military and 7 police officers, 14 teachers, 5 nurses. In addition, 17 respondents said that they had been students.

(i) Employment in South Africa

We asked respondents whether they were working (employed or self-employed) at the moment

- 117 (50%) said that they were employed / self-employed
- 56 (24%) felt they were 'adequately' supporting themselves in the current situation.

We did not ask the other 50% of respondents (who did not indicate that they were working) how they were surviving financially, and further research regarding survival mechanisms and techniques in this regard is necessary.

(j) Income

Of those respondents (163 of the total sample) who were prepared to divulge what their average monthly income was;

R0-500	R510-1000	R1 - 1500	R1501 - 2500	R2501 - 5000	< R5001
35	43	40	33	8	4

Almost three quarters (72%) of those who provided data live on an average monthly income below R1500.

(k) Dependents

Many Zimbabweans have left with other members of their family (or close friends / colleagues). We asked respondents whether and how many people they were supporting in South Africa?

- 100 respondents (42%) said that they were supporting people in South Africa. These varied in number from 1 person to 6. (these respondents were supporting a total of 218 persons in the country)

We asked respondents whether and how many people they were supporting in Zimbabwe?

- 199 respondents (84%) said that they were supporting people in Zimbabwe. These varied in number from 1 person to 15. 102 respondents said they were supporting 5 or more people. 19 of these said they were supporting 10 or more people there.
- 97 of the 100 respondents who are supporting people in South Africa are also supporting people in Zimbabwe.

Even with limited incomes, the vast majority of respondents are still supporting people back in Zimbabwe, in some instances many people. This is a clear reflection of the dire socio-economic conditions in Zimbabwe, where unemployment is now estimated at 80%, inflation once again spirally upwards, and the prospects of meaningful economic recovery in the short to medium term (i.e. in terms of tangible relief for the majority of inhabitants) exceptionally gloomy.

(l) Main problems

We asked respondents what were their three main problems / concerns at the moment.

- 172 respondents (approx 73%) pointed to their legal status

- 158 respondents (67%) mentioned jobs / employment
- 119 respondents (50%) mentioned accommodation

Conclusions

It is not possible to draw any hard conclusions as to how representative this group of respondents is in terms of the general population of Zimbabweans currently in South Africa. As such it is NOT possible to make simple extrapolations from this data in relation to the estimated one million plus Zimbabweans that are currently believed to be in South Africa.

Nevertheless, the survey findings provide illustrative patterns and trends that raise a range of considerable concerns.

- A massive majority of the sample **[85%] came to South Africa after 2000**, which marks both the severe decline of the Zimbabwean economy and the proliferation of political violence.
- A significant proportion **[34%] of the sample indicated that they had left Zimbabwe for political reasons**,
- **30% reported being direct victims of torture in Zimbabwe**. Of these, 47% can be identified as having clinically significant psychological disorder, and the prevalence rate overall was 14%. This is low in comparison with other recent Zimbabwean studies, but nonetheless significant from the point of the kinds of assistance that will be needed for Zimbabwean refugees.
- Over 4 in ten respondents **[44%] claimed that they had been denied access to food**, and nearly half of this group had left Zimbabwe because of political reasons.
- 80% of respondents did not have legal status in South Africa. This includes most of the respondents who said they were direct victims of torture. The associated vulnerabilities of illegal status amongst the high numbers reporting torture this has important implications for the asylum process in South Africa.
- Finally, in regards to the economic and social well-being of this sample, 72% of those willing to divulge their income are living on incomes less than R1,500 per month. This is in a group that admits to supporting dependents both here in South Africa and also in Zimbabwe.

The overall picture, as we have said, gives great cause for concern. There is a pressing need to understand better the position and plight of Zimbabweans that have come to South Africa in search of refuge, and to ensure that those who legitimately can be called refugees as opposed to economic migrants

receive the treatment and care expected under South African and international law.

A first step would be to extend this small survey so that the national picture is more clearly understood. This is a necessity in order to avoid unhelpful extrapolations from this data. The way forward is neither rhetoric nor denial: better data leads to better policy. Certainly, the suffering indicated in this small survey deserves more attention than it is currently receiving.