



## The Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

June 5, 2008

### **Statement of The Rt. Rev. M. Thomas Shaw, SSJE Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts on Zimbabwe**

On June 4, I returned from a one week trip to Zimbabwe as the representative of the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, the Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori and at the invitation of Bishop Sebastian Bakare of the Diocese of Harare.

What I have seen and experienced on this trip only magnifies my agreement with the call by church and political leaders around the world for far stronger international action to contain Zimbabwe's rapidly escalating political crisis.

You are undoubtedly aware of the ongoing political turmoil and violence in Zimbabwe, particularly now leading to the June 27 run-off election. You may be less aware of the suffering of the thousands of Anglicans there who have been physically assaulted while worshipping and their houses of worship locked. The government police forces considers them enemies of President Mugabe and are attacking them as they have human rights workers and others.

I was asked me to travel to Harare to express the church's solidarity with our Anglican brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Harare who are under profound oppression and to gather information for the presiding bishop about the political situation there. I interviewed some 50 priests, lay people and human rights lawyers in Harare over the course of my one week stay.

I can report that the situation in Zimbabwe is indeed grave. There are widespread violations of human rights, daily reports of murder and torture and an economic and humanitarian crisis of enormous proportions. The inflation rate is one million percent and unemployment ranges between 80-90%. There are long lines for gas and at banks, limited electricity and clean water and virtually empty shelves in supermarkets. The judiciary has been compromised as members of the high courts and Supreme Court have directly benefited from President Mugabe's so-called "land reforms" fueling corruption and violations of civil liberties.

According to the Zimbabwe constitution, citizens are entitled to freedom of religious expression and conscience but these rights have been violated. Thousands of Anglican worshipers have been locked out of their churches, their church properties have been occupied by government-backed allies and their personal automobiles have been



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confiscated. A local priest must move from house to house every night to avoid possible arrest. A nine-year-old boy and a widowed mother of five children were beaten by police for failing to leave the church site.

I preached last Sunday to 400 people who had moved to the back yard of a house and I heard reports of many who had been randomly arrested on false charges.

In this period of heightened tensions prior to the June 27 runoff elections for president, an entire nation is at risk.

The Episcopal Church presiding bishop, the Archbishop of Cape Town and the Archbishop of Canterbury, have all issued statements condemning the brutal attacks on Anglicans seeking to worship in peace and on the general citizenry. I agree with Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori in calling for far stronger international action to contain that nation's rapidly escalating political crisis.

Because journalists and aid organizations have been banned from Zimbabwe under the oppressive Mugabe regime, it is important for me to share my observations and to urge our elected officials and diplomatic representatives to employ all efforts to bring pressure to bear on the Mugabe administration in order to restore human rights to Zimbabweans and to ensure fair elections on June 27.



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