

## NEWSLETTER FROM CATHY BUCKLE IN ZIMBABWE



### Gold, the Curse of Zimbabwe

14 April 2023



Dear Family and Friends

These mid April days it is cool and misty in the mornings. The grass is dying back and turning golden, the red hot pokers are flowering in the wetlands and the termites are back in the trees, their orange soil tunnels tracking skywards. We wake these April mornings not to the sound of bird calls but to the roar of generators or the noise of people chopping wood or pushing wheelbarrows of empty containers to look for water. We do not wake to the smell of dew on golden grass but to the smoke from fires of people cooking outside. We have gone hurtling back into the dark days again and are reaping the bitter harvest of greed, corruption and mismanagement, or most of us are anyway.

The big 'hush-hush' subject, the gold mafia operating in and out of Zimbabwe, continues to be exposed in a four part series of documentaries produced by Al Jazeera. It is utterly sickening. Gold is hemorrhaging from every pore in Zimbabwe, carried out through airports in bags that are not inspected and by people who are not questioned. The smugglers are arrogant and boastful as they smirk, laugh and brag about their exploits. They talk not about ounces but about kilograms of gold; they talk not about millions but about billions of dollars.

There is a vast web of facilitators and enablers who accept bribes to not see, not look, not ask. The net of complicity is a tangled trail where self enrichment is the only goal. Gold, like other precious metals and minerals is the curse of Zimbabwe, the undoing of us. The devastation to our rivers, our environment and our wild places by the gold hunters is incalculable. Gold is not building infrastructure, equipping schools and hospitals, uplifting our nation, instead it is constructing huge mansions, filling private vaults and bank accounts and amassing fleets of luxury vehicles for the few.

It is too painful to write more because where there is such huge wealth for a few, life has become all but unbearable for the rest of us. In the past couple of weeks the street rate of the US dollar to the Zimbabwe dollar has soared again and today hovers at US\$1: ZW\$1500 or 1600. This has led to an immediate shock wave in the prices of everything. A week ago a loaf of bread was Z\$950, today its Z\$1400 and heading up. Inflation's at 480% and the bills are piling up unpaid, un-payable.

Where's the Minister of Finance in the midst of this huge crisis ravaging the lives of ordinary Zimbabweans? He's been busy campaigning to be an MP in Bulawayo. And his campaign promise isn't food, electricity, jobs or the abolishment of his punitive 2% tax on all electronic financial transactions. Instead the Minister is promising to install Wi-Fi at ten sites in Cowdray Park where some people are still using outside Blair toilets. There are just no words.

But wait, the strangest news of the past fortnight has come from the Vice President, who also doubles as the Minister of Health who said that Zimbabwe is going to introduce a law making it illegal for other nations to recruit our health workers. "If one deliberately recruits and makes the country suffer, that is a crime against humanity" he said. In response Dr Norman Matara, the head of Zimbabwe's Doctors For Human Rights said: "The government should note that health workers are not being pulled away from the country but pushed away from the country by the meager salaries they are getting."

The question we all ask the Ministers are these: Can you put yourself in the shoes of nurses, doctors and healthcare workers? Do you have to walk with a bucket to find water and carry it home every day? Do you go to work hungry? Can you imagine going to work without a hot shower or cup of tea because the electricity's off for 18 hours day? Can you imagine not being able to afford a loaf of bread? Can you imagine your pay being a fifth of the amount you used to earn before the Zim dollar was reintroduced in 2019? Can you imagine your pay being a fifth of the amount you need to survive, feed and educate your children?

Questions but no answers. Gold mafia and smugglers. Chopping wood and carrying water. Our poor Zimbabwe; can we find courage when election 2023 comes along in the next few months?

There is no charge for this Letter From Zimbabwe but if you would like to donate please visit my website. Until next time, thanks for reading this Letter From Zimbabwe now in its 23rd year, and my books about life in Zimbabwe, a country in waiting.

Ndini shamwari yenyu (I am your friend) Love Cathy 14 April 2023. Copyright © Cathy Buckle  
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