

Zimbabwe at the Crossroads

The Amherst Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Spotlight
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*The Social Justice Spotlight is written monthly by individual Social Justice Committee members. This month's Spotlight comes to us from **Sue Kelsey and Bob Berwick.***

Zimbabwe, a landlocked country in Southern Africa, is a beautiful land. With verdant forests, abundant wildlife, and spectacular scenery, it might be a garden spot for visitors. Awhile back it was, but now it is undergoing considerable turmoil.

In 1980 Robert Mugabi came to power in Zimbabwe. Under his leadership, Zimbabwe has struggled. Power became centralized in his hands. Mass killings, economic unrest, an epidemic of AIDS, and a decline in the Zimbabwean standard of living have marked his regime. Mugabi has a strong grip on the military and has controlled elections in order to stay in power. He is responsible for many human rights violations in Zimbabwe.

In 2008 Morgan Tsvangirai, a leader of the Movement for Democratic Change, won considerable support in national elections. Recently Mugabi and Tsvangirai have reached an agreement to share power, Mugabi retaining the position of president and Tsvangirai assuming the role of prime minister. The arrangement is tenuous, but many Zimbabweans have hope.

One sign of this hope is The Trees of Life program, a grass roots movement that helps perpetrators and victims overcome their fears and prejudices about past human rights crimes and initiate healing dialogues. The Social Justice Committee has invited a person intimately involved with the reconciliation movement in Zimbabwe to speak with us at the May 30 UUSA Sunday Service.

Andrew Iliff, a native Zimbabwean, is studying law and African Studies at Yale University. He is acutely interested in finding a just resolution to human rights violations in Zimbabwe. He has worked on transitional justice in the southern African region with Human Rights Watch, the International Center for Transitional Justice, Idasa, and the Research and Advocacy Unit of Zimbabwe. After explaining how ideas of national transitional justice in Zimbabwe have been put on hold, Andrew will highlight local reconciliation efforts among Zimbabwe's different peoples, and how The Trees of Life program might contribute towards broader national reform with continued growth.

Please join us at that service to learn more.