

Brethren,

Here is a snapshot of being a Christian in modern Zimbabwe.

Sam

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Subject: Rock Bottom

I stood for over forty minutes in a line at the bank to withdraw my own money this week - its not unusual to have to queue for even longer than this.

There was no electricity - again - so the ATM machines were not working - again. Even if the ATM's were working, those queues often need an hour and a half to get to the front. Because of the oppressive, iron-fist regulations from Harare, individuals are only allowed to withdraw one and a half million dollars at a time from the bank - even if they have just deposited a hundred times that amount the same day. The bank charges a 'handling fee' for the withdrawal of amounts of one and a half million dollars or less but you can not withdraw more without applying for permission from the Reserve Bank in Harare. To put all these figures in perspective, let me explain! You have to stand in a queue in the bank for four days in a row - each day drawing out the maximum amount, each day paying the 'handling fee,' in order to purchase one tank of fuel for your car. Three days of maximum withdrawals will give you enough for one filling at the dentist. By the time you've got enough money together, the prices will have gone up again but for most of us all these things are just dreams anyway because now even a visit to the dentist has become an affordable luxury.

Who would ever have imagined that a dental visit would be thought of as a luxury!

A combination of iron fist regulations, prices going up by an estimated 10 percent every day, and a government which appears completely clueless about what to do next, I think it would be accurate to say we have reached rock bottom. This week the legislation enabling the government to read our emails, listen to our phone calls and intercept our letters sailed through parliament and it produced barely a ripple. Everyone is now only looking at the day to day human suffering and major national and international groupings have begun issuing the most frightening warnings. The Zimbabwe Doctors for Human Rights said recently: "It can no longer be said that the health service is -near collapse, It has collapsed." [. .]

This week I heard the grim news from a friend whose wife is eight months pregnant. She lives in a rural area and has been told at the nearest health clinic that in addition to the financial charge, she must also bring a twenty litre container of water with her when she comes to give birth or they will have no choice but to turn her away. This is the reality of what we all hope is finally rock bottom.