

ARTPEACE AND FRIENDS

‘Ye shall know them by their fruits’ - I recently attended a talk in London by Kent-born farmer Ben Freeth who rose to international prominence (for suing the regime of Robert Mugabe for violating the rule of law and human rights) titled ‘Zimbabwe after Mugabe’. Excerpts from a poignantly documented award-winning, clandestine documentary film, ‘Mugabe and the



White African’ were also shown. Stripped of their land and forced to watch their house torched, Ben Freeth and family have seen at first-hand the violence of Zimbabwe’s authoritarian regime. They watched, appalled, as their home (above right) burnt down at midday on August 30, 2009. Below left, their home in better times. The family had just returned from church to find the war veterans had set fire to farmworkers’ houses (above left) barely 100 yards away. Ben along with his mother-in-law and father-in-law, Mike Campbell, were savagely beaten and the latter died



two years later of his injuries. The Mike Campbell Foundation was then established. Its goal is to work towards the restoration of justice and the rule of law in Zimbabwe and to uphold the basic



human rights that should be fundamental to society. They support rural people by, among other things, sending them on a ‘Foundations for Farming’ course teaching appropriate conservation agriculture farming methods to support themselves in extremely difficult times. The foundation’s ultimate vision is the elimination of human rights infringements throughout Zimbabwe. Despite beatings, torture and court battles, Ben Freeth, a committed Christian, still has hope for the hundreds of thousands of farmers, farmworkers and their families who lost their livelihoods.

Euphoria: Ben enthused about the historic occasion last November whilst dining with his son in Bulawayo. When news came through that Mugabe had finally resigned, they drove 270 miles through the night passing many tanks on the way to join celebrations in Harare. One million Zimbabweans spontaneously marched through the streets delirious with joy and not a policeman in sight – an unforgettable experience!

Ben had just returned from speaking about the current situation in Zimbabwe appearing before a US Congressional Committee, assessing the southern African nation. He said they certainly ‘got’ the message. Although he is still hopeful that step by step, there will eventually be real change in Zimbabwe, 100 days after his reign, President Emmerson Mnangagwa has still to ‘deliver’ and **no fruit has yet fallen**. All Zimbabweans await the next election in August with trepidation, hoping and praying it will be free and fair. Photos credit: courtesy of Ben Freeth.

ArtPeace, are feeling the pressure and were so grateful for recent sculpture sale proceeds plus a few donations but sadly, our kitty currently stands at the princely sum of £10.75p!



Herbert, a new artist friend from Kwekwe said: 'Money is now so short that people sleep on banks' verandas for two to three days and are limited to \$10!

Fortune attended the hospital (left) as he has been unwell for weeks and needs regular medicine following ghastly torture by thugs during the 2008 election. He said:

'A donor at this hospital gave queuing patients little bags of food. The photo below shows a funeral I attended of a lady who passed away coz of lack of treatment. She couldn't afford drugs so left behind her 2 little girls aged 9 & 6 right.'



Crops: The prolonged drought stunted growth of young plants and the excessive rains that followed worsened matters, but our friends are all so grateful for our help with seed and fertiliser. Artists are now sowing cabbage, carrots, tomatoes and onions. The first pickings of maize are now taking place. Right:



Emma, Coster's wife in their field and (left) the family's evening meal served with a relish. As you can see, there is **still no change** for these poor Zimbabweans - with life a constant battle. **Johnston Simpson**

