

ARTPEACE AND FRIENDS

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT IT COULD NOT GET ANY WORSE: January saw many towns and cities in turmoil again as the cost of fuel increased by 150% and the price of many basic commodities was beyond the means of poor Zimbabweans. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, the largest labour organization in the country, called for a three-day national stay-away protest action and many took to the streets to protest.



Armed soldiers, firing live ammunition, appeared on the streets of Zimbabwe's towns and cities. A reputed 17 people were killed with numerous beatings and arrests. This photo of protesters being tear-gassed in the street was taken before the Internet and social media were shut down and the country went into lockdown. Artist Christine reported. 'Hi Mr Simpson.

On Saturday we woke up to the news that a young man had been murdered. His brains were splashed on the road at the entrance of a bar near where I stay. His brother came to identify his body close to noon time. It is suspected he was killed in the area behind the bar and had his body thrown at the front of it. The following day, we woke up to the sound of hovering helicopters. We went to look for bread at \$3 a loaf but all the tuck shops around had closed. There were eye witness accounts of people looting Choppies, a supermarket, and some were seen carrying cartons of sugar and other basics. As we were walking home a truck full of riot police stopped at the same bar where the young man's body was found, and the uniformed forces began disembarking. We walked quickly home with my daughter. While baking my bread, my skin was burning and eyes on fire. Not too far from here, they started throwing teargas. Then the gunshots started. They were multiple and heard for a long time. Then people started leaving their houses with large sticks heading towards the shops. There were cries on the streets for some time.' The young man in photo (right), was savagely beaten and sought medical attention at Silveira House. For days afterwards soldiers visited homes in the dead of night dragging innocent men and women from their homes then beating them. ArtPeace members were so frightened that some left their homes to hide and sleep in their maize fields.



Artist Mike said: 'Sometimes I think that Zimbabwe is a cursed country! Tears on our cheeks everyday - nothing to eat - no money for clothing, shelter, school fees and most of all Medicare.'

Artist Lovemore stated: 'We use art as a therapy to our problems and as sculptors have a lot to tell the world. **However, John we are short of raw colourful stones - please mention this to our friends.** We cannot fight this brutal government, but our art will tell the whole world what is happening here and by so doing we will be healing ourselves.'

A CLOSE ESCAPE: It's one thing after another for our artist friends. Last newsletter, I mentioned that rainfall had arrived in the nick of time to nourish their crops: seed and fertiliser



being provided by Marlow URC. Then, disaster as a form of caterpillar called the fall armyworm started to attack their fields. This pest, rampant in much of Africa,

quickly devastates crops by eating the heart of the plant. ArtPeace turned to their UK friends for



help - once again Marlow & Kettering URCs came up trumps and within a few days had sent me enough money for ArtPeace to buy chemicals (left) and to rent sprayers (right). The artists and families worked quickly and hard - the danger looks to be contained. Below - Ignatius inspecting his crop.



Message to our UK

friends: We as ArtPeace extend our heartfelt gratitude for the kind donations made to our group at a crucial time in our lives. When the stomach is

fortified, we find strength to work for ourselves and our families: now even more so because we



have been enabled through you to diminish the effect of the fall army worm which has ravaged our country. Your donation came in time to cheer us up in the aftermath of the violence we suffered at the hands of uniformed forces. Though things are hard and painful here, we dare hold on to hope for a brighter day. This is our home and our lives and livelihood

are here. We find strength in the love and compassion you continue to show us. Your support has gone a long way in supporting ourselves and our immediate and extended families.

May God bless you all and replenish the source from which you gave.

With love, ArtPeace Zimbabwe

Johnston Simpson