

ARTPEACE AND FRIENDS

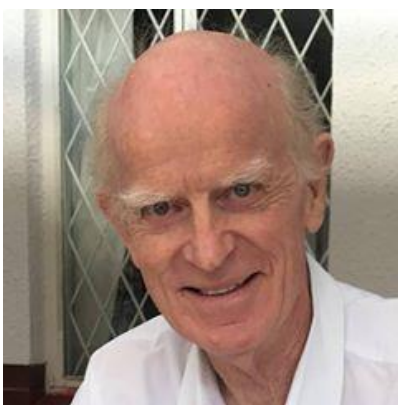
MORE CHAOS LIKELY: The Zimbabwe government's official inflation figure is 97% but in reality, shop prices have risen by 350%. Last week, the govt. made it illegal to use foreign currency inc. US dollars. Zimbabweans must now use the new Zimbabwe dollar. A decade ago, the original Zimbabwean dollar was abandoned due to hyperinflation. I still possess a Zimbabwe 100 trillion dollar note! This step has been greeted with alarm - memories of the lives wrecked, pensions and savings lost in 2008 - recollections of which will be hard to erase.



FORTUNE'S DILEMMA: The artists are desperate struggling to pay for even basic items and are in all sorts of trouble. Take Fortune for example whose world has fallen apart. He had borrowed around 50 USD to pay for his wife's medical treatment. Creditors arrived and took all his modest possessions away including blankets and their winter has arrived! The stress would appear to have caused his wife to have a breakdown of sorts and she has abandoned him leaving the children. Fortune (left) has his own serious health issues and is a mere skeleton of a man. And still



government ministers show no sign of curtailing their own extravagances: hiring luxury Dreamliner aircraft and buying thousands of weapons to quell protests. The good news is that money from some of our wonderful readers is on the way which I hope will ease Fortune's situation but so many artists are suffering. **SUICIDE:** The young man (above right, reference the last NL) who was trussed up and beaten because in desperation he stole a few items to feed his young family has since ended his life and left a note saying he simply could not carry on - that's the tragic situation some people now face in Zimbabwe.



UPDATE FROM FR DAVID HAROLD - BARRY SJ: I have been part of the John Simpson network for about fifteen years but have been rather a sleeping mole for the last four. I was living in Zambia where they have what is a distant memory here: real money. They also have fuel. There are now three filling stations within five minutes of where I lived - always open for business. And if they have power outages, they are for four predictable hours a day around which one can plan. (Global warming has given us little rain and Kariba dam hydro-electric plant can't work to capacity).

No such normal situation greets me as I return to this land (Zimbabwe) where I have lived for more than fifty years. The people are the same, so are the trees, the sky and the colours - all just beautiful. But the inheritance of freedom is tattered, and life is an unremitting struggle for those such as our sculptors under the trees here at Silveira. They work on, relying on the sales and donations your network generates for them. They have little else to hope for.

What is puzzling - maybe it should not be, but it is - is the complete lack of a plan to remedy the situation or any sense of responsibility in high places for the wreckage we live each day. Yet it is a common feature in many countries that those who have the power to change things for the benefit of their people not only do not do so but set themselves to plunder even further an economy which is already in permanent freefall. The painful thing is that, as we have seen in country after country, change only comes through courageous protest and struggle. We all hope that struggle will be focused, peaceful and non-violent. So far there is no sign of this happening.

David will visit me in September so we shall have our customary long walk along the Thames towpath catching up on things stopping off for the usual refreshment. **Johnston Simpson**



Changing a Machismo society step by step:

Beatriz Claros is a confident woman, part of the growing number of women working and taking their full part in society. She works at the Ministry of Economy and gives technical support to small cooperatives on business and agriculture. When I met her, she was visiting the shrimp cooperative supported by Christian Aid partner PROCARES.

She explained: “Women have earned the opportunity to be in this cooperative. When it comes to fishing and agriculture they would earn about 60% less than a man doing the same job. In the cooperative, they get the same share as the men. They are learning to be more active and confident citizens.”

When asked if things are changing in the home, she laughed, “In most households, Mum still gets up first to get breakfast and then goes off to work. She comes home to prepare a meal and then returns to work. She returns in the evening to do start more cooking and washing etc. Whereas the man, he has his meals ready for him when comes home and everything is done for him. However, in this rural community, the women generally are more empowered because of education and training from PROCARES and this has resulted in less domestic violence.”



Beatriz, her partner and their two-and-a-half-year-old son, live in San Salvador where they have a small business together. She is a fully trained agronomist, who studied at the National Agricultural College. Her mother and father were both guerrillas and she was born in exile in Nicaragua. She remembers that people then trusted you more and there was less violence. Today, she said, there is much more violence. The first time she was robbed was in San Salvador. She was on a bus and, although she made a noise, everyone just backed away down the other end of the bus and did not help. She could not understand this but has realised that most people are fearful. From an early age, her mother taught her to work.

“I sold products on a little stall when I was 7 years old. I worked whilst I was at high school. I started studying biology but could not pay. However, I managed to get a scholarship to pay my way. The war changed my mother. I come from a long line of matriarchs so I am bringing up my son differently from many of my compatriots. My partner originally saw men as superior but now he understands gender inequality much more and is happy to take care of our son when I need him to. He sees the social inequality and the injustice women face and understands.”

IMAGE© Commitment for Life: Beatriz Claros