

Statement to Parliament: Situation in Zimbabwe: Foreign Secretary's statement, 15 November 2017

In the early hours of this morning, soldiers from the Zimbabwean army deployed in central Harare, taking control of state television, surrounding government ministries, and sealing off Robert Mugabe's official and private residences.

At 1:26am local time, a military officer appeared on state television and declared that the army was taking what he called "targeted action" against the "criminals" around Mugabe. Several government ministers – all of them political allies of Grace Mugabe – are reported to have been arrested.

At 2:30am gunfire was heard in the northern suburb of Harare where Mugabe has a private mansion. Areas of the central business district have been sealed off by armoured personnel carriers.

Our [Embassy in Harare](#) has been monitoring the situation carefully throughout the night, supported by staff in the Foreign Office. About 20,000 Britons live in Zimbabwe and I can reassure the House that so far we have received no reports of any British nationals being injured.

We have updated our [travel advice](#) to recommend that any Britons in Harare should remain in their homes or other accommodation until the situation becomes clearer. All of our Zimbabwean and UK-based embassy staff and their families are accounted for.

And I will say frankly to the House that we cannot tell how developments in Zimbabwe will play out in the days ahead – and we do not know if this marks the downfall of Mugabe or not. We call for calm and restraint.

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson updates the House on situation on Zimbabwe

[Boris Johnson statement on Zimbabwe](#)

The events of the last 24 hours are the latest escalation of months of brutal infighting within the ruling ZANU-PF party, including the sacking of a vice-president, the purging of his followers and the apparent positioning of Grace Mugabe as a contender to replace her 93-year-old husband.

Honourable Members on all sides of the House have taken a deep interest in Zimbabwe for many years – and I pay tribute to the courage and persistence of the Honourable Member for Vauxhall, who has tirelessly exposed the crimes of the Mugabe regime, visiting the country herself during some of its worst moments.

And this country – under governments of all parties – has followed the same unwavering principles in our approach towards Zimbabwe.

First and foremost, we will never forget our profound ties of history and friendship with that beautiful country, accurately described as the “jewel of Africa”.

In that spirit, all that Britain has ever wanted is for Zimbabweans to be able to decide their own future in free and fair elections.

Mugabe’s consuming ambition was always to deny them that choice. The House will remember the brutal litany of his 37 years in office: the elections he rigged and stole, the murder and torture of his opponents, the illegal seizure of land, leading to the worst hyperinflation in recorded history – measured in the billions of percentage points – and forcing the abolition of the Zimbabwean Dollar.

And all the while, his followers were looting and plundering a richly-endowed country, so that Zimbabweans today are, per capita, poorer than they were at independence in 1980, leaving many dependent on the health care, education and food aid provided by DFID.

Britain has always wanted the Zimbabwean people to be masters of their fate, and for any political change to be peaceful, lawful and constitutional.

Authoritarian rule, whether in Zimbabwe or anywhere else, should have no place in Africa. There is only one rightful way for Zimbabwe to achieve a legitimate government and that is through free and fair elections, held in accordance with the country’s constitution.

And these elections are due to be held in the first half of next year, and we will do all we can, with our international partners, to ensure this provides a genuine opportunity for all Zimbabweans to decide their own future. That is what we shall urge on all parties, and I will speak to the Deputy President of South Africa later today.

Every Honourable Member will follow the scenes in Harare with goodwill and sympathy for Zimbabwe’s long-suffering people, and I undertake to keep the House updated as events unfold.