

## China, Russia helping Zimbabwe ride out West's bullying



By Brigadier General Mike Nicholas Sango \*

**MOSCOW, February 25, 2016 (TBP)** - The year 2016 promises to see the deepening of Zimbabwe's relations with Russia and China, old friends who supported our quest to overthrow colonialism as long ago as the 1950s.

Both Russia and China are stepping up economic investment in Zimbabwe. They are also continuing to oppose the illegal sanctions the West has imposed on us — a blatant attempt to change an elected government by crippling our economy in the hope that the masses would rise up against it.

Yet this hope has proved utterly false, as the people of Zimbabwe refuse to adopt the West's notions about how to conduct our sovereign affairs.

Russia's biggest economic commitment to Zimbabwe to date was its agreement in September 2014 to invest \$3 billion in what will be Zimbabwe's largest platinum mine.

What will set this investment apart from those that have been in Zimbabwe for decades is that the project will see the installation of a refinery to add value, thereby creating more employment and secondary industries. The Darwendale operation near our capital of Harare is expected to produce 600,000 ounces of platinum a year when it reaches capacity.

We are confident that this is just the start of a Russia-Zimbabwe economic partnership that will blossom in coming years. Our two countries are discussing other mining deals in addition to energy, agriculture, manufacturing and industrial projects. Russia also continues to assist Zimbabwe in training young Zimbabweans in special-skills areas such as medicine, general engineering, agricultural engineering and many other disciplines.

Groundwork was laid for expanding trade and investment when Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe met President Vladimir Putin in Moscow in May 2015.

A few months after their meeting in December 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Zimbabwe, where he announced 10 economic agreements worth billions of dollars.

China is already our largest trading partner outside the continent, and the new investments will have a major impact on our economy.

Of particular importance is a billion-dollar deal that will help Zimbabwe overcome the critical shortage of electricity that prevents us from realizing our full economic potential.

Under the agreement, China will expand the capacity of our largest electric-generating facility at Hwange in western Zimbabwe, while the Chinese-funded Kariba South power extension project — adding 300 MW to the grid — will be commissioned within the next 18 months.

Another deal will involve China financing the installation of fiber-optic cable to help us expand our high-speed Internet system. It is the government's desire to ensure that every corner of the country has access to modern communication systems, including the Internet. This will facilitate trade and commerce, as the better a country's Internet, the greater its chances of boosting its industrial efficiency and developing its own high-tech sector.

China has also agreed to build a pharmaceutical distribution center in Zimbabwe. The facility will assist the government in improving the health delivery system, which has long been burdened by the debilitating illegal sanctions. This will allow us to provide medicine to all hospitals and clinics at affordable prices. But in addition to creating jobs, it will also give us a key piece of infrastructure that we can use to build out the domestic pharmaceutical industry.

China has not only become the biggest investor in Zimbabwe, but in all of Africa in recent years. Alarmed and envious of China's expanding investment on the continent, the West has tried to portray China as trying to set up its own neocolonialist system in Africa.

Zimbabwe rejects that notion. China has proved a reliable development partner. It has not dictated terms of cooperation with us. Instead the parties have negotiated and agreed to the terms under which economic cooperation is to be consummated. Such agreements take into account the need to empower our own people by accepting that mineral resources are finite.

We highly appreciate both Russia's and China's opposition to the West's efforts to harm our economy through illegal sanctions. They adamantly believe that such sanctions are illegal infringements on sovereignty because they are designed to intimidate a sanctioned country into adopting those policies that the West prefers, as opposed to those that it believes are in its best interest.

But Russia and China have not just talked the talk in opposing sanctions against Zimbabwe. They have walked the walk. In addition to investing in our country in defiance of the sanctions, they vetoed a UN Security Council resolution on July 11, 2008 that sought to impose further sanctions.

The African Union has joined Russia and China in resisting Western efforts to bully Zimbabwe. Its most important show of support was defying the West by naming President Mugabe the chairman of the AU in February 2015. Many Western governments had called publicly for the AU not to give Zimbabwe the chairmanship. These calls, however, fell on deaf ears.

As long as Zimbabwe refuses to dance to the West's wishes it will remain sanctioned

indefinitely. Yet we have already lived under these sanctions for 16 years and believe that the worst is over. Sanctions cannot defeat the human spirit, no matter how hurtful they might be.

We are thankful for the AU's support and are confident that the illegal sanctions will fail to bring us to our knees as the West so desires.

With the support that Zimbabwe is receiving from China and Russia — two powerful nations — as well as an increasingly progressive mankind, we have entered 2016 with greater hope, optimism and confidence. We look forward to positive changes in the living standards of our people.

We thank everyone who has steadfastly stood with us in 2015 and look forward to their continued support in 2016.

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