

International Monetary Fund experts visit Zimbabwe

By [Bathandwa Mbola](#)

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HARARE: A team of International Monetary Fund (IMF) experts are in Zimbabwe to begin a mission to heal the country's troubled public finances.



The IMF team, led by Erik Oppers and comprising Mike Andrews, Warren Coats, Kristian Kjeldsen and Kenneth Sullivan, will provide technical assistance in various areas, said the IMF in a statement.

This includes tax policy and administration, payments systems, lender-of-last-resort operations and banking supervision as well as central banking governance and accounting.

"Shortly thereafter, two teams of experts from the IMF Fiscal Affairs Department will provide technical assistance in the areas of tax policy and tax administration," said the IMF, adding that its staff was looking forward to working with the authorities in providing technical assistance in the targeted areas.

The mission comes weeks after the IMF board announced the lifting of a ban on technical support to Zimbabwe in the above targeted areas.

The IMF's visit is seen as a sign of thawing relations between global money lending institutions and Zimbabwe, where a coalition government between President Robert Mugabe and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai has been in place for almost three months.

The IMF cut off financial support to Zimbabwe about a decade ago over differences with long-time ruler Mugabe over fiscal policy issues and other governance issues.

Today the mission is due to meet Zimbabwe Finance Minister Tendai Biti and central bank Governor Gideon Gono. The mission is expected to end on 29 May.

Meanwhile, on Sunday, Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) called on the intervention of the African Union (AU) as well as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to help break the dead-lock in the unity government.

There have been reported tensions in the unity government as a result of disagreement around issues like national healing, democratisation and the rule of law, which the party accused President Mugabe of refusing to address.

Tsvangirai told an MDC rally in south-eastern Zimbabwe after the party's national council meeting that it was committed to the power-sharing agreement, but wanted to see more respect for civil rights, the rule of law and the implementation of political reconciliation.

This follows a fresh wave of farm invasions by Mugabe's ZANU-PF members and last week's arrest of two independent journalists and a top human rights lawyer.

"The National Council resolved that all outstanding issues be referred to SADC and the AU as guarantors to the Global Political Agreement.

"The transitional government should also urgently deal with issues of governance, national healing, democratisation and the rule of law," the MDC said in statement.

Being long-time rivals, President Mugabe and opposition leader Tsvangirai formed a unity government in February after months of wrangling but sharp differences remain over issues such as the review of the posts of central bank governor and attorney general.

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