

Dear Friends and Supporters,

I am writing to you all today with very sad news.

When we founded our charity 22 years ago, we promised our supporters the following:

1. We would run the charity without deducting anything for administration costs, so that 100% of the donations would go to the school.
2. We would stop if we were no longer certain that your donations would be used for the purpose agreed on with the school (interference by a corrupt government).

In recent days, one event has followed hot on the heels of another. We on the Board saw ourselves compelled to adopt the following resolutions:

- To terminate our support for Nabushome School.
- We will instruct our bank (Commerzbank) to terminate the numerous direct debits.
- We ask supporters who have set up standing orders (automatic bill payments) with their banks to terminate these.
- Not to forward any more donations to Nabushome.
- To have the Charity dissolved by a Members Meeting convened for this purpose. The Charity will continue to be run until at least the end of the year in order to ensure an orderly winding-up.
- To donate the remaining Charity funds to the charity **SOS Kinderdorf**, as provided for in our statutes (accessible on our website at www.foerderer-der-nabushome-school.de).
- Donation receipts for donations made so far in the calendar year 2020 will be sent in the usual form by the end of the year.

Details:

1. The fact that Zimbabwe is a bitterly poor and very difficult country is something you have heard from us or the media on repeated occasions over the years. Following independence in 1980, Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) was one of the model countries of Africa; it was even known as Africa's breadbasket. The new president, Robert Mugabe, succeeded not only in inspiring his own people but also in convincing Western politicians. The governments of many countries were enthusiastic about Mugabe's ideas and dynamic approach.

Over the years, however, Mugabe's attitude and that of his government changed completely. More and more corruption crept in, and formerly affiliated tribes began to fight each other. Mugabe rigged one election after another to stay in power. His main enemy became the country's white population. Thousands of white farmers lost their property and were forced to flee the country. The economy fell into a deeper and deeper hole. Large sections of the population became unemployed. Medical care almost completely disappeared. Schools had to be closed because there was less and less money for teaching materials and paying teachers, etc., etc.

You already know much of this from our newsletters.

For many years, we saw our school in Nabushome, deep in Matabeleland, as a "little island", far away from the troubles and confusion of the big cities of Harare and Bulawayo – an island with an honest rural population who were willing to help us develop Nabushome School. We looked forward to a positive future. Thanks to your help, our Charity was able to realize many projects at the school, to ensure a reasonable teaching set-up, to provide the pupils with vital school lunches and much more.

The situation in Zimbabwe deteriorated more and more. How often did we say things can't get any worse?

Mugabe was deposed by his own army under the command of Mnangagwa, who belonged to the same party. Nevertheless, there was a certain hope in the country, which we shared to a certain extent, that things would at least stop deteriorating. How wrong those hopes were!

The rapid downward spiral continued. For a long time now, the country has not received any development aid from the West. Great Britain expelled Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth many years ago. In his speech before the UN, the new president failed to convince the global community of his promises. Nobody believed him.

The US dollar, which had been introduced as a substitute currency, was replaced again by the Zimbabwe dollar. The reason given was that every country has a right to have its own currency. This just accelerated the country's decline. Zimbabwe has too important many commodities (especially from South Africa). After many years of unpaid bills, its southern neighbour cut off the power supply. Since then, there has only been electricity for a few hours a day in Zimbabwe. The country also buys petrol and diesel in South Africa in US dollars, of which it has fewer and fewer.

Back now to our Charity and our school.

For many years, we kept our school going by transferring money in US dollars. When the US dollar was replaced by the Zimbabwe dollar, we opened a US-dollar account in Victoria Falls, to which then we transferred our donations. That worked for a time until the government intervened last year and banned domestic banks from paying out US dollars to their customers. One could still transfer US dollars to accounts from abroad, but these would be converted by banks into Zimbabwe dollars at a rate fixed **by the government**. That the government took a big cut here hardly requires mentioning. Thanks to a timely warning from our many friends, we never fell into this currency trap.

How did things continue?

The next lifeline for us was the international money-transfer operator WESTERN UNION. We transferred US dollars to Zimbabwe, and our friends were able to pick up our donations in that currency. This, too, worked for some time until a few weeks ago we were blocked by the bank. Evidently I/we were suspected of money laundering. After contacting the bank, I was asked to submit some documents, which I was pleased to do – after all, we have no secrets.

After that, I was asked to send more documents, which I also supplied.

Finally, I was asked to submit documents showing who our donors were and how much we received from each individual. That was too much. We explained to Western Union again who we were and that we could not supply the requested documents for reasons of data privacy. We referred them to our detailed website. We still have not received a reply from the bank.

In the meantime, we are starting to wonder whether the CIA (Western Union is an American bank) may somehow be involved.

2. Corruption

At least as bad as the above-mentioned problem is the rapid increase in corruption. Basically, this is nothing new – it is widespread in all countries in Africa. But in Zimbabwe it was limited for many years to the government and various authorities. Our school was only marginally affected, if at all.

The latest development, however, is that the Councillor responsible for our school has been inciting our friends there by saying that the German charity should no longer be allowed to determine what its donations are to be used for. In future, he or the government should decide this. As you know, right from the start we never sent money to the school until we had agreed in detail with our friends how it should be used. This procedure worked very well over the years, without any problems. In this way, we were always able to report to you in detail in our numerous newsletters – supported by many pictures – on our activities and how your donations had been spent.

A similar attitude to the Councillor's is now being shown by the seven village heads of the Nabushome community. This recently became clear at an all-day meeting at the school with everyone involved.

3. What will happen to the school now?

Although we have decided for the reasons above not to transfer any more donations to the school, we are reasonably sure that the school will not fall into too big a hole.

As far as feeding the children is concerned, the school continues to have the very large school garden from which it can harvest produce. The water supply and the tools are all there. They just have to roll up their sleeves and work.

Things will be tight with teaching materials. Whether the government will be able to fill the financial gap is a big question.

Of course, we are currently all very sad that we have had to end our support so abruptly. However, we must tell ourselves that even if we had held out for another five years, things would not have got any better but probably worse. And finally we can all be a little bit proud that with your loyalty and financial support over many years we have been able to provide substantial help.

What remains, despite the disappointment, are the many positive and satisfying memories. The 22 years of our charity's work were more than eventful. We could write several books about it. We will miss the many contacts with our supporters, and not only because of their words of praise and encouragement.

I would like to thank you again most cordially for your many years of loyalty, your trust in our work, and your exceptional financial support.

Sincerely yours,

Paul Ziehl

Essenbach, 29 June 2020