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of Teachers, AFL-CIO

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February 2, 2009

The Honorable Hillary Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington D.C. 20520

Dear Madame Secretary:

Congratulations on your confirmation as the nation's 67th Secretary of State. With your confirmation, the Senate has expressed the country's resolve that we will again have an open, humanitarian, and strong foreign policy to address the great challenges the U.S. faces in diplomacy and development.

We particularly want you to know how much we welcomed your comments before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee calling for an end to autocracy in Zimbabwe. We urge you to keep the crisis in Zimbabwe as a high priority on the Administration's agenda.

The misery, death, persecution and repression of the Zimbabwe people inflicted by Robert Mugabe and his ruling party cohorts have been well documented by the American press and international human rights organizations. The desperate situation has also been told to AFT leaders by our Zimbabwe colleagues – teachers and nurses. Teacher unions and civil society organizations with whom we work in Zimbabwe report that most schools have been closed for six months, that hospitals and clinics are empty – with no doctors, nurses, medicines, or patients-- and that children are abandoned, ill and starving. Now, as you are aware, Zimbabweans face a massive increase in deaths and illness due to cholera, further economic and social deterioration, and an upsurge in political and economic refugees.

At its January 18th meeting, the AFT's Executive Council expressed its profound concern over the suffering of the Zimbabwe people. We have intensified our efforts to inform and mobilize our members and unions throughout the world to bring pressure on the Mugabe regime and the other regional leaders to end the suffering of the Zimbabwe people and restore the rule of law and democracy. Even though the opposition MDC has agreed to take cabinet positions with Morgan Tsvangirai as Prime Minister, Mugabe has made it clear that he will retain ultimate authority and has exclusive powers over the state security apparatus. The newest development brings little, if any, change to the lives of ordinary Zimbabweans.

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We acknowledge that the United States has in the past applied certain pressures to the Mugabe regime like limited sanctions and cut off of aid, however it is time to up the ante. Taking our lead from those in the region like Desmond Tutu and Graca Machel of South Africa, the Botswana government and others, the U.S. can provide leadership in the U.N. Security Council to take urgent actions to pressure Robert Mugabe to end his reign of terror while at the same time supporting a unity government. The devastation in the country requires urgent public private partnerships to aid the Zimbabwean people and rebuild the country. The AFT is ready to do its part to work with the Zimbabwe teachers and health care employees to rebuild their education and health infrastructure.

Sincerely,

Randi Weingarten
President

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