

ARTPEACE AND FRIENDS

The world is understandably preoccupied with Covid and the dreadful situation in Afghanistan. I hesitate to write this article as I know some people object to upsetting photos and



miserable news but I have never been one to dress things up and know that most readers want to hear the plain unvarnished truth of life experienced by our ArtPeace friends – these are their photos. Although their Covid situation does not appear as awful as ours, cases are increasing as are deaths. On a brighter note, some of the older artists have now had their first vaccine supplied by China. However, the country on a wider front is in a worse shape now than during the 1990's amid concerns of an economic crisis and human rights violations. Zimbabwe's 'new' President appears to be consolidating his grip on power with moves reminiscent of his predecessor's style. Photo left: A young boy wipes the screen of a commuter omnibus at a traffic light -then proceeds to ask for 12 cents. He is one of the many street children who sleep rough and do not attend school. Perhaps it is best to give you a realistic idea of how

thousands of young people in Zimbabwe are struggling to survive in words received direct from a young artist friend only a few days ago which sums up the situation far better than I ever could.

'Sometimes it seems like we are in danger of becoming a black hole nation that is void of light. We have so much going for us yet in the same breath we are drowning. We are sinking. This year has been a period of mourning. It's amazing how we still have more tears shed. There was a week where every single day, there was news of someone close to us passing on. Mourning our loved ones properly is such a part of Shona culture it's like the COVID pandemic has robbed us of our tears and our goodbyes. It has robbed us of closure. My tears flow for those we have lost but even more so for the generation of our children. I do not want to paint a morbid picture, but the truth is our children have become an endangered species. The Authorities are awfully silent on the youth ritual killings, child disappearances, child marriages, youth prostitution and sexual deviance and youth drug and substance abuse.

Hope is a very young mother whose own mother left when she was young to live in the diaspora. For 3 years she had one child, then two years ago she had another. She became a prostitute then. I saw her recently and she had become a shell of her beautiful youthful self. Not only does she sell crystal meth, but she uses it too. She is a nomad, never staying too long in one place for people to observe her and maybe even engage child services. She is so thin and wasted and conversation does not go beyond greeting pleasantries.

Our leadership leaves things like these to go uncorrected because it takes away the spotlight from them and their bad governance. We are so tired and broken, you actually understand the one who says they do crystal meth to numb the mind and spirit. It is wrong but I can understand why someone would want a break from life, from pain. There are many like Hope. The irony in her name makes me want to weep. I am sure her parents meant well. No arrests are being made peddling drugs. We have many missing children. There is a rising awareness of child marriages but amidst the noise are the relevant people doing anything? One day we will wake up to a nation of broken invalids. There will not be a young soul to govern or be governed. For now, our leadership is smug watching the fire on the mountain top. They will wake up when the river floods the village and they have made no boats and hopelessly can't swim.'

From artist Fortune: Sad sad news John. Remember Blessing (left), the deformed boy you once helped - he is no more and passed away yesterday at a traditional healer's shrine. His mother could not afford hospital fees so she had no option but to take him to a traditional healer. The other photo (below) is his grave being dug whilst his brother is watching as per their tradition - one brother is allowed. Also, he will be buried at midnight as per their custom. Male relations took control and their Apostolic church elders were banned from attending the burial so it was not a Christian funeral. They do that coz of his deformed state and think poor Blessing was cursed. No women were allowed. Now the mother is distraught as the

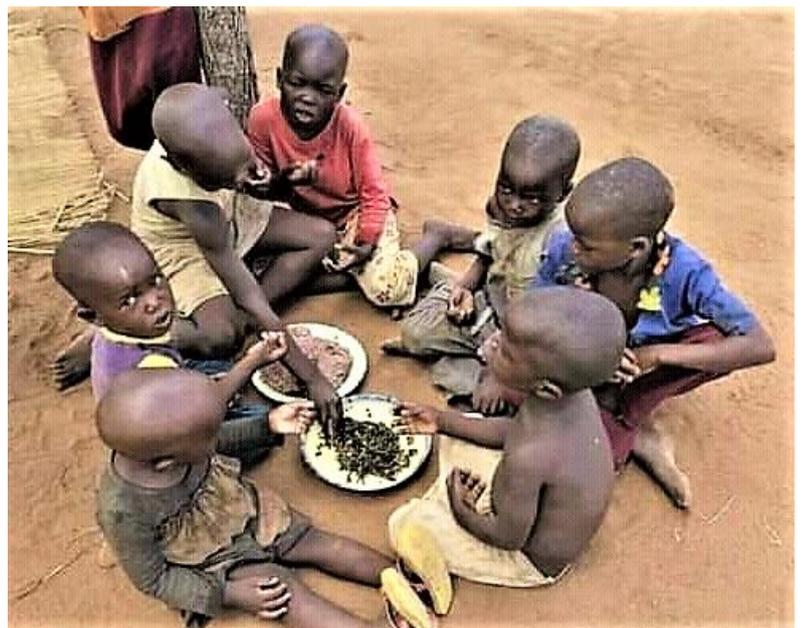


traditional healer still wants payment. John – this is life in some parts of Zimbabwe where living is often unbearable, and superstitions still reign.

traditional healer still wants payment. John – this is life in some parts of Zimbabwe where living is often unbearable, and superstitions still reign.



From Artist Ignatious: 12-year-old Tapiwa (left) looks after himself and is busy cooking dried maize called mangai in Shona. His parents passed away 4 months ago. He lives in Ziko village. Some people try to keep an eye on him but there is not much food. Below, village children share sadza and dried vegetables.



SHARED SERVICES: Artpeace are so pleased to be part of our Sunday services – a highlight of their week. Some churches are now open, but I believe the government have decreed that only those with two vaccinations can attend. Sadly, donations greatly appreciated from a few people in various parts of the country, are at an all-time low and ArtPeace sales have been at zero for the last two years. Few are now sculpting as there seems no point and no one is travelling over from Zimbabwe. On a brighter note, Catherine a nurse from Bristol hopes to be able to visit her family in October so may be able to take over some mobiles and reading glasses. **Johnston Simpson**