

# Zimbabwe to Christchurch. The best decision I have ever made

*By Agnes Goto, Beacon Global Freight Solutions Ltd, Christchurch*

Leaving Zimbabwe in early 2002 was the hardest decision I've ever had to make in my life. It meant giving up the things I held most dearly to my heart. I had to leave my family and friends behind and 'venture' into a new country and start a new life. The future looked bleak for us due to the political and economic instability in Zimbabwe. New Zealand was a far cry from what was happening in Zimbabwe, a safe and stable place to raise our children and realise our dreams. I was filled with both anticipation and dread, as New Zealand was thousands of kilometres away from home.

My coming here broadened my horizons immensely. It was a personal revelation on how other people lived their lives without fear and instability. When I first walked into a supermarket I was astounded by the amount of food that was on the shelves. They were packed to the brim with every imaginable product you can think of. This was when it dawned on me that we had come to the right place. Being used to queuing up for everything from fuel to cooking oil and having to put up with price increases almost everyday as well as food shortages and power blackouts, this was such a pleasant change for me. I felt that it was well worth the sacrifice I had made by leaving my family.

Something that struck me the most was when we were walking down the streets in a Christchurch suburb; I pointed out to my husband how none of the houses had security fences, razor wire or even bars on the windows. This was really different from what we were used to in Zimbabwe, where you have to make yourself a prisoner in your own home just to stay alive.

I was reading a news article the other day and this is the statement that summed up Zimbabwe "Zimbabwe, a nation whose economy is in tatters, where poverty and unemployment are endemic and political strife and repression commonplace!" Having been away for so long I try to imagine what's going on there, I try to keep track of the events that are happening there and this causes a lot of emotional turmoil.

I worry constantly about my family...are they safe, how are they surviving, how are they getting from point A to B with all the food and fuel shortages and to top it all up, a health system that is now almost non-existent. Every time I talk to my mum I can't help but notice a tinge of sadness and helplessness when she tells me how hard life has become. I always break down in tears as I feel so powerless and useless. My only prayer is that they keep safe and all I can do is assist them financially and hope that the money I send will be enough to feed them, if only for another day.

I have learned a lot since coming here. I have learned that in a democratic society such as New Zealand people are accountable for their actions and decisions, from the Prime Minister right down to the layman in the streets. I can walk down the streets without having to turn my head in fear all the time. I can go to bed and wake up the following morning knowing that there is fuel to take me to work and food to eat.

I can say that I am one of the lucky few that managed to come to a country like New

Zealand and feel for the first time what it means to be free. Since coming here, it has not been an easy road, as one would expect when they are starting out, let alone being an immigrant. I have felt the warmth of the Kiwi people, their kindness and support every step of the way. All I wanted was a job, for me to be able to feed my family both here and back home. I actually got more than I could imagine because I am now working for an international freight and customs company 'Beacon Global Freight Solutions Ltd' in Christchurch. This has given me a lot of hope for the future as I feel that I am able to pursue my career which I thought I had left for good when I left the Customs Department in Zimbabwe. I now have 2 children and I believe they are going to have bright futures here.

All I can say is that the best decision I ever made was coming to New Zealand and I am looking forward to my life here. Not a day passes though when I don't think of my fellow countrymen back home and wonder how life could have been so different, if only...



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