

## Iranian President Ahmadinejad, Opening Zimbabwe Trade Fair, Denounces West

**President Robert Mugabe declared at a state dinner on Thursday that Zimbabwe supported Iran's right to pursue a nuclear development program, saying the two countries have been 'unjustly vilified' by the Western powers**

Taurai Shava, Blessing Zulu & Ntungamili Nkomo | Washington 23 April 2010

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, in remarks officially opening the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair on Friday, accused the West of seeking to dictate how countries such as his own should run their affairs.

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Mr. Ahmadinejad said Zimbabwe and Iran have forged a friendship based on a principled stand against Western interference. He accused the Western powers of seeking control of Zimbabwe's natural resources.

At a state dinner on Thursday, President Robert Mugabe said Zimbabwe supported Iran's right to pursue a nuclear development program, saying the two countries have been "unjustly vilified" by the West.

The United States and Britain are currently seeking more stringent sanctions against Iran for enriching uranium to weapons grade, and has maintained targeted sanctions against Mr. Mugabe for nearly a decade.

The Iranian leader said every nation has the right to use its resources for the benefit of its own people without interference from any other nation.

He said trade fairs like the one he opened in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second largest city, provide opportunities for developing countries like Zimbabwe and Iran to forge closer economic ties.

Mr. Mugabe and Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara among other officials were present for his remarks, but Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai was conspicuously absent.

Mr. Ahmadinejad's visit brought another source of friction between President Mugabe and Mr. Tsvangirai, whose formation of the Movement for Democratic Change said inviting him sent the wrong message to the rest of the world as Zimbabwe was re-engaging the West and trying to rebuild its economy.

MDC sources said Mr. Tsvangirai flew to South Africa on Thursday, when Mr. Ahmadinejad arrived.

But House Speaker Lovemore Moyo, chairman of the Tsvangirai MDC formation, broke ranks with the party in attending the Ahmadinejad speech. He told VOA Studio 7 reporter Blessing Zulu that senior officials must distinguish between party and government

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business.

Political analyst Marion Tupy of the Washington-based CATO Institute told VOA reporter Ntungamili Nkomo that Mr. Mugabe's endorsement of Iran's controversial nuclear program was not surprising – but added that his comments did not necessarily represent the position of the Harare power-sharing government.

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