

US freezes Zimbabwe farm assets

From correspondents in Washington

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THE US today froze the US assets of 26 Zimbabwean entities it said are controlled by key members of President Robert Mugabe's government, accusing them of undercutting democracy in Zimbabwe.

Under an executive order issued by US President George W. Bush, the Treasury Department "designated" 24 commercial farms and two businesses controlled by Mugabe administration officials who the US government says are undermining democratic processes in Zimbabwe.

The move freezes their access to the US financial system and prohibits US citizens from doing business with them.

"The Mugabe regime rules through politically motivated violence and intimidation and has triggered the collapse of the rule of law in Zimbabwe," said Robert Werner, director of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control.

"By denying the Mugabe regime access to the US financial system and US persons, we're cutting off the flow of support they could use to further destabilise Zimbabwe," he said.

Zimbabwe is reeling from its worst economic crisis since independence from Britain 25 years ago, triggered by government seizures of white-owned farms for resettlement of landless blacks and allegations of vote rigging.

The Treasury Department said the commercial farms were among those handed to favoured members of Mr Mugabe's government following his chaotic land redistribution scheme.

The two businesses include Cold Comfort Farm Trust Co-operative, an agricultural cooperative controlled by National Security Minister Didymus Noel Mutasa, and Ndlovu Motorways, controlled by Sikhanyiso Ndlovu, an official with Mugabe's ruling ZANU-PF party.

Treasury has designated Mr Mugabe and 76 other Zimbabwean government officials and "persons of influence" for economic sanctions.

Reuters