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Zimbabwe: Free participation in election process impossible

Amnesty International today warned that the Zimbabwe government's persistent and systematic violations of human rights in the run up to this month's parliamentary elections is making free participation in the election process impossible.

During a mission to Zimbabwe last month, Amnesty International delegates gathered evidence of continued government intimidation and arbitrary arrest of opposition candidates and supporters, manipulation of food distribution for political ends and severe restrictions on freedom of assembly and expression.

The organisation is presenting its latest findings in a briefing to election monitors ahead of the 31 March vote.

"Persistent, long-term and systematic violations of human rights and the government's repeated and deliberate failure to bring to justice those suspected to be responsible means that Zimbabweans are unable to take part in the election process freely and without fear. The climate of intimidation and harassment in which the elections are planned is a serious matter for international concern," said the Director of the Africa program, Kolawole Olaniyan.

In its briefing, *Zimbabwe: An assessment of human rights violations in the run up to the March 2005 parliamentary elections*, Amnesty International documents a series of on-going human rights violations committed by the government and its supporters including:

- Arbitrary arrests to hinder opposition campaigning activities, including the detention of at least eight candidates of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and the MDC's Director of Elections this year as well as several opposition campaign workers;
- Acts of political violence, including the beating of MDC supporters and the burning of their homes in Chipingi South, Manicaland in January;
- Continued manipulation of food distribution by the government-controlled Grain Marketing Board, denying opposition supporters access to maize, the staple food for most Zimbabweans;
- Widespread intimidation and harassment of opposition supporters, with many afraid of post-election reprisals aimed at areas which vote for the opposition.

"The use of implicit threats and non violent tactics to intimidate opposition supporters is

widespread. Given past acts of reprisal against opposition voters including eviction, assault, and denial of food, such tactics create a pervasive climate of fear and threat," said Kolawole Olaniyan.

Amnesty International is calling on all governments and inter-governmental bodies sending election monitors to Zimbabwe to ensure that they fully take the human rights context into account when monitoring the elections. The monitors must be given access to all areas of the country and focus particular attention on access to justice, food distribution, freedom of movement, assembly and expression, as well as equal security for all candidates and supporters.

For a copy of the briefing *Zimbabwe: An assessment of human rights violations in the run up to the March 2005 parliamentary elections*, please see:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engaf460032005>

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