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Zimbabwe: Call for Africa leaders to speak out against brutality in Zimbabwe

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about the continued attacks on trade unionists, human rights activists and members of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in Zimbabwe. The organisation is calling on all African leaders, both political and civil society leaders, to speak out against human rights violations and to urge the government of Zimbabwe to respect and protect the rights of its citizens.

As Zimbabwe commemorates 27 years of independence on 18 April 2007, many of its citizens are either in police custody, nursing injuries inflicted by the police and other state security agents, or living in fear for daring to exercise their right to peaceful protest. Many are spending sleepless nights afraid of being abducted or of being subjected to torture, simply for choosing to belong to an opposition political party. Since 2000, the people of Africa and of the world over have witnessed the rapid erosion of human rights in Zimbabwe, including mass destruction of the homes and livelihoods of 700,000 people in 2005. Is it not time we all speak out with one voice?

Recently, the world witnessed systematic violations of human rights targeted at government critics in Zimbabwe. On 11 March 2007, the police in Harare shot and killed Gift Tandare, a local activist. On the same day police arrested leaders of the political opposition and other activists who tried to take part in a prayer meeting in Harare. Many of those arrested were severely beaten, amounting to torture, at Machipisa police station in Harare. The injured included Morgan Tsvangirai of the main opposition party, the MDC, who suffered a fractured skull, and Lovemore Madhuku of the National Constitutional Assembly, who suffered a broken arm. Other severely injured activists included Grace Kwinjeh and Sekai Holland who are both MDC activists. Police kept the severely injured activists in custody denying them access to lawyers and medical care. In total, about 50 activists were arrested for exercising their right to peaceful association and assembly. These are rights guaranteed in Section 21 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe; Articles 10 and 11 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and Articles 21 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned that African leaders, who are members of the African Union, have allowed Zimbabwe to operate outside the African Union and United Nations human rights frameworks. They have allowed a culture of impunity to thrive in Zimbabwe, with arrests, detention and torture now becoming a regular occurrence.

The organisation would like to see African leaders doubling their efforts to bring to an end the suffering in Zimbabwe. Central to resolving the crisis in Zimbabwe is the need to ensure that perpetrators of human

rights violations are held accountable and that the victims have access to justice. Any attempt to circumvent the needs of victims will not bring a lasting solution. We are therefore urging all leaders in Africa to insist that the government of Zimbabwe implements fully the recommendations of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in the 2002 Fact Finding Mission Report as a first step to addressing the human rights situation prevailing in the country.