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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CRITICIZES ZIMBABWE GOVERNMENT'S ACTION TO PREVENT GAY AND LESBIAN GROUP FROM PARTICIPATING IN INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR IN HARARE

Amnesty International today expressed its concern at the pressure brought to bear upon the organizers of the Zimbabwe International Book Fair by the Zimbabwean authorities to ban the Gay and Lesbian Association of Zimbabwe (GALZ) from having a stall at the Book Fair at which literature and educational materials would be displayed.

Director of Information Mr Bornwell Chakaodza wrote on 24 July to the Executive Director of the Book Fair, which runs from 29 July to 5 August, calling upon her to withdraw permission for GALZ to have a stall. After much deliberation, the International Book Fair organizers have reluctantly agreed to this demand.

"This is a heavy-handed attack upon the fundamental human right to freedom of expression, to which the Zimbabwean government is ostensibly committed under its international legal obligations. It sits ill with the theme of this year's Book Fair, which is Human Rights and Justice, that GALZ is being denied the right to advocate and promote the rights of gays and lesbians," the organization said.

Amnesty International considers that every person has the right to freely hold and to express his or her convictions and to be free from any kind of discrimination, including by reason of their sexual orientation. The official decision to ban GALZ from publicly displaying literature and material at the Book Fair effectively prevents the exercise of these rights.

The organization called upon the Zimbabwean government to withdraw its demand.

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