

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 46/013/2005

UA 157/05

Fear of Excessive Use of Force/ Fear for Safety

08 June 2005

ZIMBABWE

Thousands of protestors

Amnesty International is calling on the Zimbabwe Republic Police to exercise restraint and fully respect human rights when policing any public protest actions associated with the 'stay-away' scheduled for 9 and 10 June.

A coalition of political and civic groups – including the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), the Crisis Coalition of Zimbabwe and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) – has called for workers to stay away from work as a protest against the recent forced evictions and demolitions of informal settlements and trading shacks in many of Zimbabwe's urban areas in the past two weeks. The operation, instigated by the Zimbabwean government to "clean up" urban areas (**see UA 148/05, AFR 46/011/2005, 1 June 2005**) has left tens of thousands of people without access to shelter or food during Zimbabwe's winter and during a period when the country is experiencing acute food shortages.

The planned 'stay-away' is expected to be accompanied by public protest actions, as has been the case with previous 'stay-aways' in Zimbabwe, most notably in March 2003. Public anger in some affected areas has already resulted in traders and residents retaliating against police. In response, armed police and the armed forces have been sent into some areas to quell unrest, raising further concerns for the safety of the affected communities.

Amnesty International has already received credible reports of an increased police presence in many of the urban areas which were affected by the evictions and demolition operation, including the imposition of police roadblocks and the use of low-flying police helicopters. Additionally, the spokesman for the Zimbabwe Republic Police, Assistant Commissioner Wayne Bvudzijena, has reportedly warned Zimbabweans that any civil protest actions will be dealt with forcefully.

The Zimbabwe Republic Police used excessive force when policing protest actions during the last similar 'stay-away' in March 2003. Amnesty International is urging the Zimbabwean authorities to police any protest actions in accordance with internationally recognised human rights standards, including the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, and to uphold the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly as provided for in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to both of which Zimbabwe is a state party.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International's concerns over the anticipated demonstrations linked to the 'stay-away' scheduled for 9 and 10 June stems from experience of previous occasions when the Zimbabwe Republic Police have used excessive force to deal with public demonstrators. On 18 and 19 March 2003, the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) organised a similar 'stay-away' as a protest against what it saw as attempts by government authorities to intimidate their supporters ahead of two by-elections on 29 and 30 March 2003. Police also used excessive force in arresting approximately 260 women, some with babies and children, during a peaceful protest in Harare's Africa Unity Square on 31 March 2005 (see UA 77/05, AFR 46/005/2005, 1 April 2005).

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing serious concern at the recent forced evictions of residents of informal settlements, the excessive use of force employed against informal street traders and the associated violent destruction of property during the recent police operations targeting informal traders and residents of informal settlements which has left thousands in Zimbabwe without access to shelter or food;
- expressing serious concern at statements attributed to Assistant Commissioner Wayne Bvudzijena of the Zimbabwe Republic Police that any public demonstrations will be dealt with forcefully;
- noting the excessive use of force by the Zimbabwe Republic Police in dealing with recent protests in Zimbabwe including during the arrests of approximately 260 women during a peaceful demonstration in Africa Unity Square on 31 March 2005;
- urging the Commissioner of the Zimbabwe Republic Police to ensure that any policing actions undertaken in association with the scheduled 'stay-away' on 9 and 10 June conform with internationally-recognised human rights standards, in particular the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, and to uphold the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly as provided for in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to both of which Zimbabwe is bound as a state party.

APPEALS TO:

Commissioner Augustine Chihuri
Zimbabwe Republic Police
Police Headquarters
PO Box 8807
Causeway
Harare
Zimbabwe
Fax: +263 4 253 212
Salutation: Dear Commissioner

The Hon. Kembo Mohadi MP
Minister of State for Home Affairs
Ministry of Home Affairs
11th Floor Mukwati Building
Private Bag 6050
Causeway
Harare
Zimbabwe
Fax: + 263 4 726 716
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representative of Zimbabwe accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. All appeals must arrive by 10 June 2005