

AI INDEX: AFR 63/05/97

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Zambia: Donors should seek assurance of human rights improvement

PARIS --- As the World Bank-hosted Consultative Group for Zambia meeting opens tomorrow in Paris, Amnesty International called upon donor governments to press for concrete assurances of Zambia's respect for human rights.

"Since the November 1996 elections, opposition party leaders in Zambia have faced threats of deportation, journalists have been detained or harassed by criminal charges, and non-governmental organizations have been under pressure to be silent," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International wants human rights to be on the agenda for discussion at the Consultative Group meeting tomorrow. Donor governments in their bilateral relations should raise concerns about human rights, since Zambian leaders of civil society are discouraged by the Zambian authorities from doing so. Those governments granting foreign assistance should also provide assistance to build and strengthen institutions that promote and protect human rights in Zambia, such as the newly created Human Rights Commission, the organization said.

In the run-up to the November 1996 presidential and parliamentary elections, Zambia's constitution was amended in May 1996 in such a way that the main opposition candidate, former president Kenneth Kaunda, was prevented from standing as a presidential candidate. Many western donors, including Denmark, The Netherlands, Norway, UK and USA, suspended aid and balance of payment support to Zambia out of concern about good governance. The meeting in Paris will decide whether the aid freeze will be lifted on Zambia.

"Donor governments gathering in Paris tomorrow should be aware that serious human rights problems continue in Zambia and should use their talks with the Zambian authorities to promote better human rights safeguards for civil society," Amnesty International said.

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