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Zambia: Donors meeting crucial for human rights in Zambia

PARIS - Amnesty International is urging donors who gather today at a World Bank-hosted meeting to demand concrete, effective human rights reforms in Zambia -- since the government has not taken active steps to prevent future incidents of torture and other human rights violations.

“We had wanted to be able to congratulate the Government of Zambia for initiating human rights reforms, but unfortunately it has failed to tackle effectively recent violations such as the police torture of political detainees, nor has it made any promise to change laws that enabled that torture,” Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International is asking those discussing whether to restore balance of payments assistance to send a strong message to Zambia that human rights reforms must be adopted.

In March, Amnesty International released a report documenting allegations that at least six political detainees were tortured by police. Local human rights activists estimate that more than a dozen suffered torture.

In its report, Amnesty International made a series of recommendations, including:

- removing from active duty those alleged to have tortured or condoned the torture of detainees, pending a thorough, impartial investigation that results in criminal prosecutions.
- condemnation of torture by President Frederick Chiluba and other top officials, to make it clear torture will not be tolerated at any time and under any circumstances.
- legal reforms to break what appears to be a pattern of torture in Zambia.
- strengthening human rights safeguards, including ratifying the United Nations Convention against Torture and bolstering the powers of Zambia’s permanent Human Rights Commission

None of these fundamental reforms have been initiated. Instead, the Government of Zambia announced on 6 May that the ministries of Home Affairs and Legal Affairs will set up an impartial further inquiry into the allegations of torture of some of those detained in connection with the October 1997 coup attempt. Amnesty International welcomed this inquiry but is concerned that it is simply a delaying tactic to persuade donors that real change has taken place.

“The police officers who appear to have run a torture chamber in the Zambia Police Force Headquarters remain on the job, in charge of suspects taken into custody, and must now feel that they are immune from prosecution,” Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International is calling on the Zambian Government to act more urgently on human rights. There should be immediate and concrete steps by authorities to suspend, and institute prosecutions against, those who were allegedly involved in the torture of coup detainees who have had a prima facie case established against them, on the basis of the evidence already gathered by the permanent Human Rights Commission and the lawyers acting on behalf of the detainees.

Amnesty International would also welcome the announced further inquiry if it clarifies the identity of others who participated in torture, or who incited it, covered it up or otherwise were implicated in the use of torture. The inquiry should enable prosecutions to be brought against them. The conduct of the further inquiry should be clearly independent from the Ministry of Home Affairs, which is the ministry with responsibility for the police.

Any reports concerning human rights should be made public -- particularly because the recent activities report of the permanent Human Rights Commission has not been available to the Zambian people nor the international community.
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For further information please refer Amnesty International's report: *Misrule of Law: Human Rights in a State of Emergency* (AFR 63/04/98).