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Public Statement

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Zimbabwe: Repression of political opponents continues, with new incidents of police brutality

Amnesty International today expressed serious concern at recent police violence against lawyers and urging the Ministers to immediately investigate the alleged misconduct of police officers from the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) Law and Order Section at Harare Central police station.

The calls come following an incident on 8 May, when police violently stopped a demonstration by the Law Society of Zimbabwe, organised to protest the unlawful arrest and ill-treatment of lawyers Alec Muchadehama and Andrew Makoni.

One lawyer, Mordecai Mahlangu, is reported to have sustained injuries in the incident. Police also bundled other lawyers--including Beatrice Mtetwa, the President of the Law Society--into a police truck and drove off to the suburb of Eastlea. Police then assaulted the lawyers before letting them go.

The organization said that the police actions were disturbing and that they point to systematic harassment and intimidation of lawyers who represent activists from the political opposition parties.

Officers from the CID Law and Order Section appear to be operating above the law--beating detainees, defying court orders, and denying detained activists access to lawyers, food and medical treatment.

Alec Muchadehama and Andrew Makoni were arrested by police outside the High Court of Zimbabwe on 4 May 2007 after they submitted papers on behalf of Amos Musekiwa, a detained activist from the main opposition political party the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Mr Muchadehama and Mr Makoni were taken to the CID Law and Order Section at Harare Central police station.

Later that night, a High Court judge issued an order compelling the police to give the detained men access to lawyers and family members and to allow food and medical treatment. Police officers reportedly refused to comply with that order. On 5 May the High Court issued another order declaring the arrest of the two lawyers to be unlawful and ordering their release. Again police did not comply and are reported to have threatened to assault the lawyers representing Mr Muchadehama and Mr Makoni when they tried to serve court orders. The detained lawyers were only released on bail on 7 May after being charged with "with defeating or obstructing the course of justice."

On 6 May police searched the offices of the lawyers and reportedly seized documents protected by attorney-client privilege. Lawyers from the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights--Otto Saki and Lawrence Chibwe--were manhandled by a senior police officer when they tried to prevent the illegal seizure of the documents.