

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AFR 46/023/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 186
8 July 2005

Zimbabwe: Government must not be allowed to silence African Union

Amnesty International today urged the African Union (AU) to challenge attempts by the government of Zimbabwe to frustrate the AU's investigation of the current human rights crisis in Zimbabwe.

The call came following yesterday's departure from Zimbabwe of Bahame Tom Nyanduga, a member of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR). Mr Nyanduga had been sent to Zimbabwe by the AU to undertake a fact-finding mission, but left the country having been prevented by the government from fulfilling this mission. The government of Zimbabwe has reportedly claimed that there were "procedural irregularities" regarding his visit.

"By trying to block the work of an African Union representative through the use of blatantly obstructionist procedural excuses, the government of Zimbabwe is showing its real fear – that African Union criticism will force other African governments to finally tackle the human rights and humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe publicly and effectively," said Kolawole Olaniyan, Director of Amnesty International's Africa Programme.

"It is deplorable that the government of Zimbabwe has treated the African Union and a respected member of its Commission in this way. We urge African Union member states to uphold the African Union's credibility and integrity and reaffirm their commitment to human rights and accountability by refusing to allow governments to deflect attention from human rights violations by resorting to the flimsy excuse of 'procedural irregularities'."

Amnesty International had welcomed the appointment of Bahame Tom Nyanduga as a concrete response by the AU to widespread calls from African and international human rights groups for the African Union to address the situation in Zimbabwe.

"We were very disappointed by the failure of the AU to address the crisis in Zimbabwe at the African Union Assembly in Libya earlier this week," said Kolawole Olaniyan. "We had strong hopes that action would follow Commissioner Nyanduga's fact-finding mission. His departure from Zimbabwe is a double blow – and we hope and expect a strong African Union reaction."

Background

On 23 June 2005, Amnesty International, along with a coalition of over 200 international and African human rights organizations, launched an urgent "Joint Appeal" to the AU and UN urging them to publicly condemn the violations taking place in the context of the campaign of forced evictions and house demolitions and to take effective action to stop them.

For further details, please see <http://news.amnesty.org/index/ENGAFR460212005>

Public Document

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