

PUBLIC

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UA 40/02 Fear for safety /Health Concern/
Conditions of detention

7 February 2002

ZIMBABWE Gertrud Ntombemi (f) - National Executive member of the Movement
for Democratic Change (MDC)
Abednico Bhebhe (m) - MDC Member of Parliament
Peter Nyoni (m) - MDC Member of Parliament
And 33 MDC supporters

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of those named above who are being held without charge at a local police station in Nkayi district, Matabeleland North. They have been denied access to their lawyers and are being held in conditions which amount to cruel and degrading treatment. They are at risk of ill-treatment having been beaten at the time of arrest and have also been denied access to medical attention.

Two Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Members of Parliament (MPs), Abednico Bhebhe and Peter Nyoni, and 34 other MDC supporters, including member of the National Executive, Gertrud Ntombemi, were reportedly ambushed by military personnel and ZANU-PF militia on 6 February. They were in a road convoy on their way to a rally prior to the forthcoming presidential elections on 9-10 March, when they found the road blocked by boulders.

According to reports, ZANU-PF militia and soldiers opened fire on the first car, puncturing the tyres. The tyres of the second car were also punctured using knives. Those inside the cars were then dragged out and beaten before being taken to the local police station.

Thirty men were locked up in one cell and six women in another, in conditions which amount to cruel and degrading treatment. They were initially denied food and drink, despite the hot weather conditions. They are being denied access to medical treatment despite reports that some are suffering from serious wounds, including Abednico Bhebhe who is reportedly in a critically condition as a result of a head wound.

BACKGROUND:

Amnesty International fears for the safety of Members of Parliament of the main opposition party, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), their families, staff and supporters, who are being subjected to a range of human rights violations (including harassment, assaults, threats, politically-motivated criminal charges, denial of right to freedom of expression, assembly and association) in the run-up to presidential elections scheduled for 9-10 March 2002. Human rights violations against MDC MPs have been occurring since Zimbabwe's national elections of June 2000, but appear to have increased from about November 2001.

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

- calling for those in need of medical attention to be given immediate access to appropriate treatment;
- calling for the detainees to be given immediate access to their lawyers;
- asking the police to ensure that charges for recognizable criminal offences be brought against the detainees or that they be released immediately;
- asking the authorities to provide minimum standards of detention for those being held and that they be provided with food and water;
- asking the authorities to fully investigate allegations of ill-treatment and ask that those responsible be brought to justice;
- expressing concern for the safety of Members of Parliament and supporters of the main opposition party, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in the run up to the forthcoming elections,
- asking the authorities to guarantee their right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly without the fear of harassment or intimidation.

APPEALS TO:

Mr Albert Mandizha
Senior Assistant Commissioner, Matabeleland North
Box 701
Bulawayo
Zimbabwe

Telegrams: Senior Assistant Commissioner, Matabeleland North, Zimbabwe
Fax: + 263 965 763
Salutation: Dear Senior Assistant Commissioner

COPIES TO:

The Hon John Nkomo
Minister of Home Affairs
Ministry of Home Affairs
11th Floor Mukwati Building
Private Bag 7703
Causeway
Harare
Zimbabwe

Fax: +00 263 4 726 716
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Diplomatic representatives of Zimbabwe accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 21 March 2002.