

18 March 2002

Further information on UA 75/02 (AFR 46/018/2002, 12 March 2002) - Arbitrary arrests/fear for safety/conditions of detention/prisoners of conscience

ZIMBABWEAn estimated 1400 people

Most of those arrested on 11 March were held for up to 48 hours but then released without charge. However, around 100 polling agents for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and others perceived to be MDC supporters are either in police custody or held by state-sponsored militias. Amnesty International believes they are held arbitrarily, and are at risk of torture.

People who have been held in militia camps report that torture is routinely employed. Militia groups affiliated to the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU - PF) are reportedly running an estimated 70 camps across the country. Police either condone the existence of these camps or do not feel that they have the power or authority to prevent them from operating. ZANU-PF youth supporters, members of the National Youth Service and security agents of the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) are reported to be actively involved in abductions, unlawful detentions, interrogation and torture. Police have reportedly stated that they do not have the authority to arrest militia members who have tortured and abducted supposed supporters of the MDC.

According to the MDC, 1068 people are in hiding, in an effort to avoid being abducted by militia. Further abductions and attacks by militia are being reported daily.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A Zimbabwean human rights organization has described how state-sponsored militia bases in 10 farms around Macheke town, in Mashonaland East Province, were being used as torture centres for suspected political opponents. National Youth Service members trained at the government's Border Gezi Training Centre near Mount Darwin are reportedly assisting in the abductions and beatings.

Human rights groups have so far recorded 22 people in Harare who have sought medical treatment after being illegally detained by militias. Hundreds of people have reported having their identity cards seized at rural road-blocks by militia members, who demand that they report to these militia camps for interrogation about how they voted in the presidential election. Under Zimbabwe's new Public Order and Security Act, not possessing an identity card can mean a heavy fine and possible prison sentence.

The election itself was characterized by intimidation and government attempts to prevent proper monitoring. Attacks and abductions by paramilitary groups have continued since the election, with one man stabbed to death in Kwekwe, Midlands Province on 13 March, a man beaten to death and one other seriously injured in an incident in Marondera, Mashonaland East Province on 15 March, and a farmer reportedly tied up and shot dead by 'war veterans' 40km from Harare on 18 March.

Robert Mugabe was declared the winner of the Presidential election and sworn in for a further six year term on 17 March. Election observer missions, including those of the Commonwealth and the Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum, recorded numerous incidents of human rights violations

in the course of the election. Diplomatic moves by President Mbeki of South Africa and President Obasanjo of Nigeria seem to be geared towards the establishment of a Government of National Unity, but it is not yet clear whether either the ZANU-PF or the MDC would accept such an arrangement.

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

- expressing concern that up to 100 people are held either in police custody or in camps run by militia groups affiliated to ZANU-PF;
- asking the government to either charge those held in formal police custody with a recognizable criminal offence or release them immediately;
- pointing out that the police have a responsibility to protect citizens from abduction and detention by paramilitary groups;
- asking that the police intervene to secure the immediate release of those held illegally in militia camps.

APPEALS TO:

President

His Excellency The Hon Robert G Mugabe
Office of the President
Munhumutapa Building
Box 7700
Causeway
Harare
Zimbabwe

Fax: + 263 4 708820 / 708557

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Home Affairs

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

Fax: +263 4 726 716

Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of Youth, Development, Gender and Employment Creation

Elliot Manyika
Ministry of Youth, Development, Gender and Employment Creation
Munhumutapa Building
Private Bag 7700
Causeway
Harare
Zimbabwe

Fax: + 263 4 708557

Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs

The Hon Patrick Chinamasa
Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs
5th Floor Corner House
Private Bag 7751
Causeway

Harare
Zimbabwe
Fax: + 263 4 790901 / 772999
Salutation: Dear Minister

Police Commissioner
Mr Augustine Chihuri
Police Headquarters
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Fax: + 236 4 728 768
Salutation: Dear Commissioner

and 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 30 April 2002.