

Web feature

Harassment of activists continues in Zimbabwe

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About 50 activists were arrested at a public meeting in Zimbabwe on 11 March 2007, in defiance of a three-month ban imposed by the authorities. The activists, including leaders of the main opposition party in Zimbabwe -- the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) -- were severely beaten during arrest and some were reported to have been tortured while in police custody.

Police shot dead one of the activists, Gift Tandare, the youth chairperson of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) local structure in a Harare suburb. Those tortured include MDC President **Morgan Tsvangirai** and NCA Chairperson **Dr Lovemore Madhuku**.

Amnesty International (AI) has received numerous reports of continuing police harassment of the political opposition and lawyers. In addition, civil society groups, including the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), the NCA and the women's organisation Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), continue to be harassed by state agents as they attempt to carry out their work.

AI has written to Zimbabwe's President, Robert Mugabe, and the Minister of Home Affairs, Kembo Mohadi, calling on the government to take effective measures to bring to an end the ongoing and grave human rights violations.

Harassment of members of the political opposition

Grace Kwinjeh and **Sekai Holland**, both members of the MDC who were reported to have been tortured by police following the events of 11 March, were prevented from seeking further medical care in South Africa on Saturday 17 March. They were prevented from boarding an air ambulance and forcibly taken from Harare International Airport to Harare Central Police Station.

Their travel documents were reported to have been confiscated and an ambulance was instructed to take Kwinje and Holland back to hospital where they were placed under armed police guard. Kwinjeh and Holland were only allowed to leave the country on 22 March after being granted an order by the High Court prohibiting the authorities from interfering with their evacuation.

The next day, Sunday, **Nelson Chamisa**, national spokesperson for the MDC, who was also beaten by police on 11 March, was attacked, by unidentified persons at Harare International Airport sustaining a fractured skull as well as multiple lacerations to the face.

On Monday, one of the MDC faction leaders **Arthur Mutambara** was released from police custody following his arrest and detention on 17 March. He was arrested at Harare International Airport on his way to South Africa to visit his family. Reports indicate that he was taken to court on Monday, but the magistrate refused to place him on remand, and that his passport has been confiscated by police.

Harassment of lawyers

AI has also received extremely worrying reports concerning harassment of the lawyers representing the political opposition since 11 March 2007. **Andrew Makoni**, a lawyer from Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), was forced to undergo an extensive body search by police when he attempted to serve police a court order prohibiting further interference with the body of Gift Tandare.

Andrew Makoni was reported to have been accused of carrying "arms of war" by the police. Police tore up the court order and an order was given to arrest Makoni if he was again seen

on the premises. Police are also reported to have accused lawyers of facilitating what police alleged to be violence perpetrated by the opposition.

Harassment of human rights defenders

On Tuesday 13 March, seven police officers arrived at the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) offices with a search warrant allowing them to search for and seize all "subversive materials" found on the premises. Two ZCTU officers, **Gilbert Marembo** and **Michael Kadukuti**, were reported to have been assaulted by police officers with open palms across their faces.

Police searched the ZCTU offices having detained ZCTU staff and visitors in the offices. The ZCTU staff was also threatened with "home visits" in the presence of their lawyers who had enquired about the alleged assaults. Police also seized four boxes containing ZCTU fliers.

The following Monday (19 March), two members of the women's organisation Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) were reported to have been taken from their homes in Harare at gunpoint by police and blindfolded. They were questioned about WOZA and assaulted before being left in the bush.

WOZA members had previously been reported to have been arrested, detained and beaten by police in Masvingo on 6 March 2007 following a peaceful demonstration against poor delivery of water services.

Since 2003, AI has documented over ten incidents where WOZA members have been severely beaten while in police custody after exercising their right to peaceful protest. They have been repeatedly denied access to food, lawyers and medical care. Often mothers are detained with babies for prolonged periods.

The continued harassment by the police of the political opposition and lawyers following the events of 11 March 2007 reflects a pattern of harassment of political opposition, lawyers and human rights defenders, documented by AI since 2000.

Take action: Stop harassment of activists Zimbabwe -

<http://web.amnesty.org/pages/zwe-220307-action-eng>

Further information:

Zimbabwe: Calls for investigation into killing of activist and release of peaceful protestors (Press release, 12 March 2007)

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAFR460012007>

Zimbabwe: Human rights and civic groups call for African leadership to address human rights and humanitarian crisis (Joint Press Release, 16 November 2005)

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAFR460312005>