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Zimbabwe: Attacks on farm workers and their children must end now

Workers and their families on the farm of opposition MP for Chimanimani, Roy Bennet, including children as young as eight years old, are being targeted in a series of violent attacks by state agents and ruling party supporters. Since the beginning of 2004 men, women and children have been assaulted, two women have been raped and one man has been killed.

"The Zimbabwean authorities should take immediate steps to end the attacks on workers on Charleswood farm and conduct thorough, impartial and transparent investigations into all allegations of human rights violations on the farm and bring those responsible for these abuses to justice," Amnesty International urged.

On Friday 2 April 2004, seventeen children from Roy Bennet's Charleswood farm, ranging in age from eight to 17 years were stopped by soldiers on their way home from a football game. After being forced to assault each other they were then beaten by the soldiers. The incident was reported to the police. No arrests are known to have taken place.

On 26 March 2004, a number of police officers reportedly forced their way into the home of a woman on Charleswood farm, handcuffed and beat her. One officer then raped her. The following morning the woman reported the rape at the local police station and identified the policeman who had raped her. One officer was reportedly arrested.

On 6 February 2004, three women working on Charleswood farm were abducted by "war veterans" who severely beat them and set dogs loose on them. One of the women, Violet Ngwenya, was later taken to another room and repeatedly raped. The women were released the following day, and reported the attack to the local police. A man was arrested in connection with the rape of Violet Ngwenya.

Two days later, Shemi Chimbarara was shot and killed on Charleswood farm, reportedly by a member of the Zimbabwe National Army who fired on a group of farm workers. Another farm worker, John Kaitano, was shot in the leg. A member of the Zimbabwe National Army was subsequently arrested and has reportedly been charged with murder.

Amnesty International is calling on the Zimbabwe authorities to ensure that the police and army abide by the highest standards of professionalism and respect for human rights.

Background

Amnesty International has previously reported on the systematic human rights abuses taking place on the farms of Roy Bennet.

In March 2003, Steven Toner, a security guard working on Roy Bennet's leased Ruwa farm was killed following a brutal attack by members of the Zimbabwe National Army. Steven Toner was accused of training Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) soldiers and burning a bus during the 18-19 March nationwide mass stay-away called for by the MDC. He was beaten and reportedly tortured with electric shocks on his fingers, toes and knees. More than 80 other workers on the farm were also assaulted and badly beaten with batons, including farm manager Norman Gardiner and his wife Isobel. On 26 and 27 March 2003, up to 100 workers were attacked and beaten by intelligence officers from the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO).

Public Document

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