

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 46/024/2008

08 July 2008

UA 198/08

Abduction/Torture

ZIMBABWE

11 youths

At least a dozen armed men, believed to be linked to the ruling Zimbabwe Africa National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party, attacked a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) at 1am on 7 July, and abducted the 11 youths from the camp who were keeping watch. The youths are now at risk of being tortured or killed.

The men who attacked the camp, at Ruwa Training Centre, some 25 km east of the capital, Harare, were in military fatigues and masked. Some of them went into a building and attacked the men who were sleeping in one room, accusing them of supporting the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Others went into another room and attacked the women who were sleeping there. At least five women and three men were injured so badly that they needed to be kept in the centre's clinic for treatment.

The IDP camp houses around 400 people forced to flee their homes by the violence that has followed the general elections of 29 March, in which ZANU-PF lost control of parliament for the first time since the country's independence in 1980. Sources in the camp have told Amnesty International that the 11 youths have not been seen since the attack. MDC supporters abducted by similar gangs have been tortured or killed.

Following the attack, a senior police officer identified only as the "DISPOL" (District Police Commanding Officer) for Harare district came to investigate the incident at about 3.30am. According to an eyewitness, he spoke only to the injured people at the clinic, not the eyewitnesses.

The people at the IDP camp had complained about the inadequate security at the camp. On 29 June men believed to be members of Zimbabwe's secret service, the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), came to the area and demanded to speak to the IDPs' leaders. About three days later some people believed to be from the police Criminal Investigations Department (CID) came and made a video recording of the people in the camp.

Outsiders can easily get into the camp without proper security checks, including suspected "war veterans" from surrounding areas known to have attacked real or perceived supporters of the MDC. On the day of the attack there was only one police officer on duty providing security for the camp.

The IDP camp has now been surrounded by riot police, after a CID officer was disarmed by IDPs when he went into the camp and started searching in one of the rooms on 8 July. An eyewitness told Amnesty International that the officer had tried to fire a gun when he was confronted.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since the 29 March elections, which gave the MDC control of parliament for the first time since Zimbabwe's independence from Britain in 1980, Amnesty International has documented unlawful killings, torture and other ill-treatment, including beatings, as well as harassment and intimidation, mainly of MDC supporters and human rights defenders. The bulk of the human rights violations have been perpetrated by supporters of the ruling ZANU-PF party and some members of the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (generally known as "war veterans"). The police and other state security organisations have been unwilling to

act against the groups of perpetrators – allowing them to kill, torture, assault and burn homes and businesses of suspected MDC supporters with impunity. In fact, in some cases the authorities have instigated or even directed attacks by these groups.

Eyewitness have told Amnesty International that police officers appear to be reluctant to arrest "war veterans" and ZANU-PF supporters who are perpetrating human rights abuses. However, police have been quick to investigate human rights abuses allegedly committed by MDC supporters, creating an impression of partisan policing. Police have further violated the rights of those in custody, denying them access to lawyers, food and medical care.

The 400 IDPs at the camp had first sought refuge at the South African embassy in Harare, and were moved to Ruwa Training Centre on 27 June with support from Zimbabwe Red Cross Society and the UN. The government undertook to provide adequate security through the Department of Social Services.

About 80% of the IDPs at Ruwa Training Centre had their homes burnt down during the political violence that started after the general elections on 29 March. Most of these attacks were led by "war veterans," some soldiers and other ZANU-PF supporters. The victims fled their homes in Mashonaland East, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland West and Midlands Provinces. At least 90 people have been killed since 29 March elections, most of them MDC supporters.

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

- expressing concern that armed men were able to attack a camp for internally displaced persons at the Ruwa Training Centre on 7 July, and abduct 11 youths;
- expressing concern that MDC supporters are coming under violent attack by suspected state security agents, "war veterans" and other ZANU-PF supporters;
- urging the authorities to provide adequate security for the internally displaced persons;
- calling on the police to investigate the 7 July attack and bring those responsible to justice.

APPEALS TO:

The Director
Department of Social Services
Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare
Private Bag 7707
Causeway
Harare, Zimbabwe

Fax: +263 4 791974

Salutation: Dear Director

The Officer Commanding
Harare Province
Zimbabwe Republic Police
Harare Provincial Headquarters
PO Box CY 154
Causeway
Harare, Zimbabwe

Fax: +263 4 754176

+263 4 753 501

Salutation: Dear Officer Commanding

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 19 August 2008