

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AFR 46/027/2003 (Public)  
News Service No: 196  
22 August 2003

## **Zimbabwe: SADC leaders should place Zimbabwe on the agenda of their Summit**

On the eve of the annual Summit of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in Tanzania, Amnesty International is calling on SADC leaders to jointly and publicly express their concern regarding Zimbabwe's deepening human rights crisis.

"We acknowledge and commend the on-going efforts of some African leaders in promoting human rights on the continent. However, the situation in Zimbabwe has yet to be adequately addressed. While the July Summit of the African Union was an important occasion at which to discuss the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe, regrettably, African leaders failed to put Zimbabwe on the agenda. This was a missed opportunity to constructively raise human rights concerns with the Government of Zimbabwe," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International has been closely monitoring the human rights situation in Zimbabwe. State-sponsored harassment, attacks and torture directed at the opposition, civil society and independent media workers continue unabated.

For example, following a mass national strike in June 2003, approximately 800 supporters of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) were arrested, two people reportedly died and approximately 150 people were injured in attacks by supporters of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), members of the Zimbabwe National Army and the police. MDC member Tichaona Kaguru was brutally attacked by police and army officers with whips, rubber batons and sticks and subsequently died from his injuries on the second day of the strike.

"Tichaona Kaguru's case illustrates the widespread human rights violations taking place in Zimbabwe and the extent to which the government will go to bludgeon dissent," the organization said.

"SADC leaders and Zimbabwe's neighbours have a critical role to play in demonstrating their commitment to the respect for human rights in Southern Africa. They should include Zimbabwe as a specific point on the agenda of the SADC Summit and to bring all possible pressure to bear on the Government of Zimbabwe to respect and protect the fundamental human rights of its citizens," Amnesty International urged.

### **Background**

More recently, President Mugabe announced at the opening of the fourth session of Parliament in July 2003 that the government would introduce new legislation governing the operations of Non-Governmental

Organizations (NGOs). Amnesty International is concerned that as with legislation introduced in the past two years, the government will use this new NGO Bill to silence dissent and further restrict the right to freedom of association.

In May, 2003 Amnesty International published a report entitled *Zimbabwe: Rights under siege* (AI Index: AFR 46/012/2003) which examined how the Zimbabwean authorities, in particular, members of the police force are using legislation such as the Public Order and Security Act, to severely restrict the rights of all Zimbabweans to freedom of expression, assembly and association.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566  
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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