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Zimbabwe elections process must safeguard human rights

Zimbabwe's government must focus on protecting human rights in the run-up to elections, Amnesty International said today as the country's leaders publicly disputed the date the vote should be held.

"Whatever date is decided for the election, the government's absolute priority must be making sure the violence that erupted during the 2008 vote is not repeated," said Netsanet Belay, Amnesty International's Africa director.

"All the rights enshrined in Zimbabwe's new constitution must be respected by the security forces. This is especially important in view of the role they played in organizing violence against perceived political opponents of the then government in 2008.

"The rights to freedom of assembly for all must be respected. Police must not arbitrarily apply provisions of the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) to stop meetings of civil society groups and other political parties as has happened previously.

"This pattern of abuses has to stop. Police should respect and protect all the rights enshrined in the declaration of rights in Zimbabwe's new constitution, and ensure the protection of people promoting human rights in an election context."

Amnesty International has already documented a number of arrests of individuals involved in conducting voter education, including the arrest by police of volunteers with the Election Resources Centre and the National Youth Development Trust.