

Zimbabwe

Take action: Stop harassment of activists Zimbabwe

Date: 22/03/2007 Web Action: WA 009/07
Index: AFR 46/005/2007

On 11 March 2007, about 50 activists were arrested in Zimbabwe after attempting to attend a prayer meeting 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 later tortured while in police custody.

Amnesty International has received numerous reports of continuing police harassment of the political opposition, lawyers and civil society groups.

On 21 March, Amnesty International sent a letter to Zimbabwe's President, Robert Mugabe, and the Minister of Home Affairs, Kembo Mohadi, calling on the government to:

- lift immediately the ban on public meetings imposed by police on 20 February 2007. Amnesty International believes that the ban is in breach of Zimbabwe's international, regional and national obligations to respect and protect the right to freedom of expression, association and assembly.
- end the human rights violations by the police and other law enforcement officials and ensure that police officers abide by the highest standards of professionalism and respect for human rights. The Government of Zimbabwe must cease to use the police and other law enforcement officials for political purposes, including for the suppression of peaceful public assemblies and the persecution of opposition parties and human rights defenders.
- ensure that the police conduct their duties in a manner consistent with respect for internationally and regionally recognised standards of human rights and policing, without discrimination. Police officers should operate in a manner consistent with international human rights law and standards, including the Southern African Regional Police Chiefs Co-operation Organisation (SARPCCO) Code of Conduct for Police Officials, Article 1 of which states that: "In the performance of their duties, police officials shall respect and protect human dignity and maintain and uphold all human rights for all persons."
- institute an immediate, impartial and independent investigation of the killing by riot police of Gift Tandare on 11 March, the shootings of three people by police on 13 March and allegations of excessive use of force by police while dispersing demonstrators attempting to attend the public meeting on 11 March. Those suspected to be responsible must be brought to justice.
- institute an immediate, impartial and independent investigation into the allegations of torture of Movement for Democratic Change and civil society leaders and their supporters. Those suspected to be responsible must be brought to justice without further delay.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned that the government of Zimbabwe has failed to address the human rights concerns that have arisen since 11 March 2007.

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 Amnesty International since 2000.

Please send appeals to the Chairperson of the African Union and the Southern African Development Community to call on the government of Zimbabwe to end human rights violations in Zimbabwe.

Please send appeals to:
His Excellency John Kufuor, Chairperson of the African Union
Office of the President
The Castle
Osu
PO Box 1627
Accra
Ghana
Salutation: Your Excellency

President Jakaya Kikwete, Chair of the organ on politics, defence and security of Southern African Development Community
SADC Secretariat
SADC House

Private Bag 0095
Gaborone
Botswana
Fax: +267 3972 848
Salutation: Your Excellency
