

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AFR 46/001/2003 (Public)  
News Service No: 015  
24 January 2003

**Embargo Date: 24 January 2003 10:00 GMT**

## **Zimbabwe: Latest wave of arrests and torture signal bleak future**

Amnesty International is calling on the Zimbabwean authorities to end immediately the cycle of harassment, arrest and torture of those who peacefully oppose the government.

"Those who expose human rights violations become themselves at risk of arrest and torture. Those who defend an independent judiciary or the right to peacefully express opinions also become themselves the victims of intimidation or unfair legal process. The authorities must enable human rights activists and opposition parliamentarians to work without fear of harassment, arrest or torture," the organization said today

An Amnesty International delegation has just returned from Zimbabwe where it met human rights activists and gathered evidence of the latest clampdown on opponents.

"We have visited Zimbabwe regularly in the last two years, but the level of fear among human rights activists has never been greater. They told us that they feel the future for their country is bleak unless the international community redoubles its efforts to protect human rights in Zimbabwe", a member of the delegation reported.

On 22 January the Amani Trust, a human rights organization which works with victims of torture, received threats to fire-bomb its offices. The organization had already suspended most of its activities in Zimbabwe because of fears for the safety of its employees.

On 20 January Pauline Mpariwa, Member of Parliament (MP) for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) for Mufakose, Harare, was arrested and held for two days before being released without charge.

Previously, on 15 January Job Sikhala, MDC MP for St Mary's, also in Harare, Gabriel Shumba, a legal officer with the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, Charles Mutama, Bishop Shumba and T. Magaya were arrested by the police. Medical evidence presented in court on 17 January indicated that the five men had been beaten on the soles of their feet and tortured with electricity.

This most recent wave of arrests seems to be part of a strategy by the Zimbabwean authorities to undermine and stifle public protest while the world's attention is focused on the country during the cricket World Cup, scheduled to commence on 8 February.

"The Zimbabwean authorities should open the country to independent scrutiny by issuing standing invitations to the United Nations Special Rapporteurs on torture and on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Those responsible for human rights violations must be brought to justice," the organization concluded.

### **Background**

The arrests of Job Sikhala and Gabriel Shumba come in the wake of a series of arrests by the Zimbabwe police. On 11 January Elias Mudzuri, the mayor of Harare and a member of the MDC was arrested together with 21 councillors and municipal workers for allegedly addressing a political meeting without clearance from the relevant authorities.

Elias Mudzuri and the 21 other detainees were released on 13 January without charge. On 12 January, MDC MP Paul Madzore was arrested and allegedly beaten by the Zimbabwe police. Paul Madzore was charged with public violence and contravening the Public Order and Security Act. He was brought before the courts on 15 January and subsequently released on bail.

**For further information on the findings of the recent mission, contact Samkelo Mkhine on + 27 83 2612656 or George Ngwa on +44 207 413 5564**

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