

PUBLIC

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EXTRA 07/99

Fear of torture/prisoner of conscience

22 January 1999

ZIMBABWE Clive Wilson, newspaper managing director
Mark Chavunduka, journalist
Ray Choto, journalist

Clive Wilson, managing director of *The Standard* newspaper, is at risk of torture after his arrest on 22 January 1999, which followed the arrest and torture of two *Standard* journalists. Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience.

A story printed in *The Standard* on 10 January 1999 alleged a plot within the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) to overthrow the government of Robert Mugabe had been foiled, and that 23 soldiers and officers had been arrested.

On 12 January *Standard* editor Mark Chavunduka was illegally arrested by ZNA military police. He was detained incommunicado for six days at Cranborne military barracks in Harare, in defiance of a 14 January High Court judgment ordering Minister of Defence Moven Mahachi and Major Mhonda of the ZNA to release him.

Ray Choto turned himself over to the civilian police on 19 January, after they had sought to arrest him in connection with the story. Amnesty International considered both men prisoners of conscience.

The two were taken to Harare police headquarters on 19 January to give statements to civilian police. They were then handed over to military police and tortured for about 24 hours at a torture centre outside the capital, Harare. The torture included beatings with fists, wooden planks and rubber batons, the use of electric shocks to the body and genitals, and having their heads wrapped in plastic bags and then being submerged in water tanks. The torturers threatened to kill the men and their families.

Mark Chavunduka and Roy Choto were released on bail on 21 January. Chavunduka said his interrogators - military police, military intelligence officers and agents of Zimbabwe's secret police, the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) - indicated that Clive Wilson and other senior staff at the newspaper group would be arrested as well. Clive Wilson was arrested by Criminal Investigations Division (CID) officers the next day after their release.

Police are now reportedly seeking to re-arrest Mark Chavunduka and Roy Choto. If rearrested, Amnesty International believes they will very probably be tortured or ill-treated again.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Independent journalists writing in newspapers not controlled by the state have been harassed and intimidated in the past. In the context of Zimbabwe's intervention in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, journalists have received death threats, and on 20 January 1999 several independent journalists in the the southeastern town of Masvingo were beaten by a CIO officer, who accused them of publishing anti-government stories.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- urging the immediate and unconditional release of Clive Wilson;

- seeking assurances that Clive Wilson is not being ill-treated or tortured, and asking that steps be taken to guarantee his physical safety;
- requesting that if his detention is to continue, he be given access to lawyers and doctors of his choice, and to his family;
- asking that an immediate independent inquiry be launched into the torture of Mark Chavunduka and Ray Choto, and that any officials found to have condoned or taken part in such torture be held accountable for their actions.

APPEALS TO:

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Office of the President
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Faxes: + 263 4 728 799 or 728799

Minister of Defence Moven Mahachi
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COPIES TO:

The Standard/The Independent
PO Box 661730
Kapje, Harare, Zimbabwe

Zimrights
PO Box 3951,
Harare, Zimbabwe
and 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 5 March 1999.