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Zimbabwe: fears for newspaper director high

Amnesty International issued today a worldwide alert expressing concern for the safety of Zimbabwean newspaper director/publisher Clive Wilson, after his arrest without charge earlier in the day.

“Clive Wilson’s arrest comes one day after the release of two journalists who were viciously tortured by military police, with the apparent collusion of the civilian police,” Amnesty International said. “There’s a clear possibility that he may also be tortured like the other two.”

Clive Wilson, whom Amnesty International considers to be a prisoner of conscience, is managing director of The Standard newspaper. Two Criminal Investigations Division (CID) officers took him into custody in connection with a story printed in The Standard on 10 January which alleged that a coup plot had been foiled in the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), and that 23 soldiers and officers had been arrested.

Editor Mark Chavunduka was illegally arrested and detained by the ZNA military police on 12 January 1999. Both Mark Chavunduka and journalist Ray Choto, who turned himself into civilian police custody on 19 January, were then handed over to the military interrogators, who beat them with fists, wooden planks and rubbers sticks, tortured them with electric shocks to the body and genitals, and wrapped their heads in plastic bags while submerging them in water tanks. The torturers also threatened the men’s lives and their families. Both men were considered prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International.

Amnesty International is alarmed at reports that the civilian police are now seeking to re-arrest Mark Chavunduka and Ray Choto. If rearrested, Amnesty International believes there is a strong possibility that the two men may be tortured or ill-treated again.

Background

Editor Mark Chavunduka was illegally detained incommunicado at Cranborne military barracks in Harare for six days, in defiance of a High Court judgement on 14 January ordering Minister of Defence Moven Mahachi and Major Mhonda of the ZNA to release him.

During his interrogation by military police and agents of Zimbabwe’s secret police, the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO), Chavunduka said his interrogators indicated that Clive Wilson and other senior staff at the newspaper group would be arrested as well.

After being charged with “publishing a false story capable of causing alarm and despondency” under Section 50 of the draconian Law and Order Maintenance Act, on 21 January both men were taken to Magistrates Court, where they were released on \$10,000 (US\$250) bail.

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