

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: AFR 46/009/2011  
18 April 2011

### **Zimbabwe: Celebrating independence amid fear**

As Zimbabwe celebrates 31 years of independence, Amnesty International today expressed concern about the lack of effort by the government to address the legacy of human rights violations and respect for human rights guaranteed in the country's own constitution as well as international treaties.

Despite the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2009, human rights violations have continued unabated. Unjustifiable restrictions of the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly are undermining the stability brought about by the setting up of the GNU.

For example, six activists, Munyaradzi Gwisai, Hopewell Gumbo, Antonater Choto, Welcome Zimuto, Eddson Chakuma and Tatenda Mombeyarara, are facing treason charges after organizing a public lecture to discuss events in Egypt and the Middle East. If convicted they face the death penalty. The six were part of a group of 45 activists arrested on 19 February 2011. The other 39 were acquitted after a magistrate in Harare dismissed the charges against them.

A political culture where human rights are trampled upon in pursuit of partisan political interests has given rise to fear. People living in rural areas in particular remain in fear of the security forces because of their involvement in the 2008 election violence and continuing failure to hold perpetrators to account.

State sponsored violence and malicious prosecutions of perceived opponents of President Robert Mugabe remain a major concern.

On 31 March, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Organ Troika on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, in a communiqué following its summit in Zambia, called for 'an immediate end to violence, intimidation, hate speech, harassment, and any other form of action that contradicts the letter and spirit of [the Global Political Agreement (GPA)]'.

The sentiments expressed in the communiqué are undoubtedly a progressive step. In the past the silence of regional leaders on human rights violations in Zimbabwe has encouraged perpetrators to carry on committing violations with impunity, but a question remains as to whether action on implementation of the GPA will follow words.

Persistent violations of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly in Zimbabwe have made a mockery of the GPA. SADC, as a guarantor of the agreement, should not just make public pronouncements but must follow through on all its resolutions with action against any of the parties to the GPA who flout its provisions.

Amnesty International today called on SADC to ensure that in its facilitation of the roadmap to free and democratic elections in Zimbabwe, human rights protection is prioritized. This is crucial given

the recognition by SADC of persistent violations which have continued despite the formation of the unity government and the extreme violence which has characterized recent elections in the country.

Amnesty International is also concerned that the law to enable the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission to start its work is still to be enacted. Enabling the Human Rights Commission to operate would be a good start in addressing the human rights challenges facing the country.

Since February, Zimbabwean civil society has faced an upsurge in incidents of harassment and intimidation in what has been seen as a clampdown by the Zimbabwe Republic Police, with arbitrary arrest, detention and torture occurring with alarming frequency across the country.

Talk of a possible election in 2011 is also fuelling tensions within the GNU and in communities. Very little has been done to address the tension in rural communities arising from the 2008 state-sponsored election violence.

Human rights activists have also come under immense pressure, mainly from the Law and Order Section of the Zimbabwe Republic Police, and face charges for exercising their constitutionally guaranteed human rights.

On Independence Day the continuation of human rights violations in Zimbabwe is particularly poignant, casting a dark shadow over the country's celebrations. The three Principals to the GPA should act decisively to address the culture of impunity for human rights violations that has stalked the country for a decade. They should strive to guarantee the safety and security of everyone in Zimbabwe. Reforms to end partisan law enforcement must be implemented without further delay.