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Zimbabwe: Commonwealth leaders must adhere to the Harare Declaration in its entirety

Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe must not be allowed to deflect Commonwealth scrutiny of his human rights record, Amnesty International's Commonwealth Association said today.

There are reports of a campaign initiated by President Mugabe to block the re-appointment of New Zealander Don McKinnon as Commonwealth Secretary General for alleged bias in his handling of Zimbabwe's suspension from the intergovernmental body for violating its human rights principles. President Mugabe has accused some Commonwealth governments of neocolonialism for criticising his human rights record.

"The record of arbitrary arrests, unfair imprisonment, torture and impunity in Zimbabwe speaks for itself, and black and white Zimbabweans are entitled to protection," said AI's Commonwealth spokesperson, Ced Simpson.

Failing to take some sort of action against these violations of the Commonwealth's principles, would be a betrayal of the people of Zimbabwe, and the Commonwealth's own historical stand against racism.

Commonwealth leaders have a responsibility not to downplay the police ill-treatment, illegal killings, and silencing of the media, judges, political opposition party supporters, and human rights defenders that AI has documented in Zimbabwe over recent years, he said.

"In the 1995 Harare Declaration member states recognised 'racial prejudice and intolerance as a dangerous sickness and a threat to healthy development'. Commonwealth members cannot pick and choose which parts of the Harare Declaration to uphold, and to whom the rules apply. This declaration is the bedrock of the Commonwealth's commitment to standing up for people's rights. One standard for all must apply throughout Zimbabwe and throughout the Commonwealth," Amnesty International said..

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