

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Zimbabwe : local elections marred by state-sponsored violence**

Amnesty International strongly condemns state-sponsored violence , torture, arrests and intimidation of opposition candidates and supporters during country-wide local council elections held on 28 and 29 September.

"Once again, government authorities have failed to ensure that elections take place in a climate free from harassment and intimidation. All allegations of human rights violations, including torture, against opposition Movement for Democratic change (MDC) officials and supporters during the local elections must be effectively investigated" Amnesty International said.

Several MDC supporters were reportedly assaulted prior to and during polling. For example:

- Mike Magwaza, Roy Bennet and Stewart Girvan were arrested on 29 September. Roy Bennet is the MDC MP for Chimanimani and Mike Magwaza is his bodyguard. Mike Magwaza and Stewart Girvan, a South African friend of Roy Bennet's, have reportedly been beaten while in police custody. All three are presently being held at Chipinge police station, Manicaland province. They were initially denied access to their lawyer Arnold Tsunga.

On 30 September, Arnold Tsunga filed an application with the Chipinge Magistrate's Court asking the police to produce all three detainees. Mike Magwaza, Roy Bennet and Stewart Girvan have reportedly been charged under the Electoral Act for allegedly taking photographs within 100 metres of a polling station. Roy Bennet has also reportedly been charged under Section 8 of the Land Acquisition Act for allegedly refusing to vacate his farm.

- Tendai Maluzi, Cosmos and Barbabas Ndira, Tom Spicer and Reuben Tichareva were arrested on 27 September and charged under the Public Order and Security Act with public violence allegedly in connection with an incident that took place in the Harare suburb of Mabvuku the week before. All five were reportedly beaten and tortured while in police custody. Tom Spicer reportedly suffered electric shock torture and was beaten on the soles of his feet. All five are MDC youth members. They were released on 30 September and have been remanded out of custody until 23 October.

- In Gutu and Bikita districts of Masvingo province, the homesteads of several MDC candidates and supporters were reportedly burned down during the election weekend. In

Masvingo North, a polling agent was reportedly beaten. Thus far, no arrests have been made in connection with these attacks.

Zimbabwe's Electoral Supervisory Commission confirmed that the local elections were marred by violence. Few independent election observers were able to monitor the elections due to accreditation only being granted at the last minute. It was reported that irregularities, such as the late arrival of ballot boxes, occurred in several wards.

"The outcome of the Commonwealth troika's meeting last week in Nigeria is yet another disappointment for victims of human rights violations in Zimbabwe. The leaders whom President Mugabe might listen to - other African Heads of State - should push for an end to further violations. This week's SADC Summit must not be another missed opportunity" the organization said.

### **Background**

The run-up to the local elections was also marred by violence and irregularities. Approximately 700 MDC candidates were prevented from registering or contesting the elections largely in response to threats, intimidation and violence, but also as a result of irregularities in the nomination procedures.

On 27 September, the day before the elections were to start, an MDC petition to the High Court to nullify the election nomination process, citing widespread intimidation and assaults of their candidates and irregularities in nomination procedures, was dismissed.

Public Document

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