

Amnesty International Web feature

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Zimbabwe's women demanding rights

In Zimbabwe, the majority of human rights activists are women. Since 2005, hundreds of women protesters have been arbitrarily arrested and detained.

"I would rather die standing up for my rights than to be labelled a coward by future generations"
WOZA member, February 2007

In Zimbabwe, the majority of human rights activists are women. Women fight for rights because they are often the ones who struggle to feed their children, pay for school fees and for healthcare. Even these basic necessities have become increasingly unaffordable to most households in the country's ever deeper economic, social and political crisis.

Zimbabwe's women activists confront the government demanding respect and protection of human rights. They take part in peaceful marches and meetings, mainly as part of women's and human rights organizations. In the last seven years, however, the government has become increasingly intolerant of critics of its policies.

The police's widespread use of excessive force, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention of government critics has been backed by the government. Particularly targeted are human rights activists, trade unionists, media workers, NGO workers, lawyers, students, the political opposition and other perceived opponents.

Since 2005, hundreds of women protesters have been arbitrarily arrested and detained for engaging or attempting to engage in peaceful protests. Whilst in police custody, most women interviewed by Amnesty International had been subjected to beatings and other ill-treatment. Many suffer further abuse because they are women, including sexist verbal abuse and derogatory accusations.

Irene is a human rights activist in Zimbabwe. Her family was forcibly evicted from a farm in 2002 and her new home in Bulawayo was also destroyed in 2005 during the government's programme of mass forced evictions. After her only parent died, Irene had to earn money selling vegetables to support her six siblings. Since vendors have their goods confiscated and are at times made to pay fines, Irene decided to join other women in her community and take part in peaceful demonstrations organized by Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA).

Irene has been arrested at least eight times after engaging in peaceful protest as a member of WOZA.

In August 2006, Irene was again arrested during a peaceful march to the offices of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe. The march was organised by WOZA to protest against abuse of women and arbitrary seizure of money by police and youth

militia at roadblocks.

Irene was kicked above the navel by a police officer during the arrest -- at the time she was two months pregnant. She was later detained over night at the police station where she noticed that she was bleeding. Other women protesters detained with her, alerted the police officer on night duty as they feared it could be a miscarriage. The police officer was reported to have said that "that would serve her [Irene] right as she was doing things [demonstrating] she should not be doing." Irene was only allowed to go to hospital the following day when she was released. She continues her activism, risking arrest and ill-treatment.

In the face of increasing government clampdown, Zimbabwean women human rights defenders have demonstrated incredible resilience, bravery and determination to end human rights abuses. They are aware of the obstacles and the dangers they face and refuse to be intimidated.

Amnesty International urges the government of Zimbabwe to respect the vital role played by women human rights defenders, to allow them the freedom to assemble and associate freely and peacefully. The government must bring an immediate end to ill-treatment perpetrated by the Zimbabwe Republic Police.

Watch
Video documentary on Zimbabwe (including footage on President Mugabe) (in English)
Listen
Real women activists telling their story
Act now
Stop harassment of activists in Zimbabwe (in English)

Take action: [Stop harassment of activists in Zimbabwe](#)

Read the report: [Zimbabwe: Between a rock and a hard place – women human rights defenders at risk](#)

Read the press release: [Zimbabwe: women at the forefront of challenging government policy face increasing repression](#)



A riot police officer arrests a woman
protester in Harare, 2002.
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