

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AFR 46/007/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 112
10 May 2005

Embargo Date: 10 May 2005 00:01 GMT

Zimbabwe: Intimidation and abuse of human rights campaigners continues

Amnesty International today called on the Zimbabwe Government to end five years' of harassment and repression of human rights campaigners.

"Hundreds of ordinary Zimbabweans, who have fought to protect the rights of their fellow citizens, have faced intimidation, arbitrary arrest, assault and torture at the hands of a government intent on concealing its violation of human rights. The government must ensure that those responsible for all human rights violations, including against human rights campaigners, are brought to justice and laws that violate international human rights standards are repealed," said Kolawole Olaniyan, Director of the Africa programme.

In a new report, *Zimbabwe: Human rights defenders under siege*, Amnesty International documents the misuse of state power to prevent human rights campaigners from exposing human rights abuses and publicly criticising the government.

The report contains examples of numerous violations directed at human rights campaigners, including:

- The involvement of the Zimbabwe police in several cases of serious assault on human rights campaigners and a failure to bring those responsible to justice;
- The arbitrary arrest of hundreds of human rights campaigners, including a two-year persecution of the women's activist group Women of Zimbabwe Arise;
- Systematic government attacks on the independence of judges and lawyers with repeated harassment and assault forcing several to resign or retire;
- Use of repressive media laws to close down independent newspapers;
- The revival of repressive laws introduced under the white minority regime of Ian Smith, such as the Private Voluntary Organisations Act;
- The introduction of the NGO Bill, which bans international human rights organisations from operating in Zimbabwe and severely restricts the work of national human rights groups;
- Use of state-controlled media to intimidate human rights campaigners and discredit the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and its recently published report on the human rights situation in Zimbabwe.

Amnesty International calls on the Zimbabwe Government to immediately end the harassment of human rights campaigners and to repeal all legislation that violates international human rights standards. The Government must also ensure the independent investigation of all cases of police assault, torture, unlawful arrest and detention and bring to justice those responsible.

"This sustained attack on Zimbabwe's human rights campaigners speaks volumes about the length to which the government will go to cover up human rights abuses and prevent criticism of its actions. The African Commission has also called on the Zimbabwe Government to repeal legislation used to obstruct the work of human rights campaigners. It is high time the government fully implemented the recommendations of the African Commission's report," said Kolawole Olaniyan.

For a copy of the report, *Zimbabwe: Human rights defenders under siege*, please go to:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engaf460012005>

Public Document

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