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Fear for safety

20 April 2000

ZIMBABWE

farming communities and opposition political activists in rural areas

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Opposition activists and supporters, real or perceived, are being intimidated and attacked, and at least six have been killed, in rural areas by so-called "war veterans" and other supporters of the ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). Far from condemning these abuses, which are continuing with the apparent complicity or acquiescence of the authorities, President Mugabe has repeatedly made statements supporting those responsible.

In February 2000 President Mugabe lost a referendum on a proposed new constitution. This major defeat for his government was followed shortly afterwards by an upsurge of political conflict. Former independence war fighters and other supporters of the ruling ZANU-PF began harassing and attacking opposition activists and occupying commercial farms; the occupations were peaceful at first, but have become increasingly violent.

Amnesty International is concerned that the atmosphere of fear and intimidation in the countryside is hampering freedom of assembly and association in the rural areas, particularly for those who do not support ZANU-PF, in the run-up to parliamentary elections, for which no date has yet been set.

Although opposition party supporters have also reportedly been implicated in the violence, most eyewitness reports from victims, onlookers and journalists identify the perpetrators of violence as being ZANU-PF members or supporters. There are also some news reports of violent incidents between supporters of ZANU-PF and those of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), where, in some instances, supporters of both parties have been arrested.

Senior police officers have refused to comply with High Court rulings of 17 March and 13 April that these so-called "war-veterans" and "squatters" should leave the occupied farms, and there are reports that police have failed to intervene to prevent abuses or apprehend culprits at the scene. The attitude of the authorities is encouraging perpetrators to believe they can commit human rights abuses with impunity.

Amnesty International believes the violence is largely targeted at real or perceived opponents of the government. There is evidence that some occupied farms belong to farmers who are aligned to the opposition or provided transport for farm workers to vote in the referendum, and in some cases actively campaigned for a "No" vote.

On 16 April 2000, armed men in a vehicle reportedly bearing ZANU-PF markings stopped a car full of MDC members and supporters, who had been preparing for a political rally, south-east of the capital, Harare. They smashed the car windows and threw in a firebomb, killing Tichaona Chiminya, an MDC driver. One of the passengers, Talent Mabika (f), died later in hospital, and the other five were injured. Police in the area, Murambinda Growth Point, reportedly did not intervene. One suspect has reportedly since been arrested.

On 30 March human rights activist Mr Mahoso, headmaster of Muchakata High School, near Macheke, east of Harare, was assaulted during a school function by armed men, who beat him with stones, sticks, boots and fists, and berated the staff, pupils, parents and guests present for neglecting their national duty "by not invading farms". The school has closed, with staff and pupils fearing for their lives. So far the police have not been seen to carry out any investigation.

On 16 April farmer David Stevens, who had been active on behalf of the MDC and had allowed MDC rallies on his farm, near Macheke, was reportedly abducted from his farm and shot dead by "war veterans". Another farmer, John Osborne,

was abducted by war veterans from the police station where he had gone to report David Stevens's abduction.

Farm workers are also extremely vulnerable to attacks and threats by those forcibly occupying the farms. On 3 April 20 alleged ZANU-PF supporters attacked game warden Farai Sandikonda, breaking his arm and cutting his head badly, as he tried to protect his farm manager's house, near Mvurwi, north of Harare. About a week later, ZANU-PF youth league members publicly stripped and assaulted six workers, four men and two women, at another farm north of Harare, in the Mt Darwin area. They were forced to dance and sing ZANU-PF songs while being beaten, and needed hospital treatment. Their attackers threatened to return and assault their children if they went to the police.

Amnesty International acknowledges the difficult role that the police are required to play in this situation. A police officer was shot dead by squatters on 4 April, reportedly at a farm near Marondera where he had gone to investigate the 3 April assault on farmer and MDC supporter Iain Kay. However, the government needs to ensure that the police have sufficient reinforcements to carry out their duties.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:**

- expressing concern that farmers, farm workers, political activists and others are at risk of human rights abuses by armed men apparently aligned with the ruling ZANU-PF party;
- urging the authorities to provide prompt and effective protection to all persons, regardless of their real or perceived political affiliation, and to uphold the right to freedom of non-violent political assembly and association;
- calling on the government and police to state clearly and publicly that violence and intimidation against perceived opponents of the ruling party will not be tolerated, and that perpetrators will be brought to justice;
- urging the police to take urgent measures to ensure that rallies by all political parties can be conducted peacefully and safely;
- urging the police to institute prompt and impartial investigations with a view to bringing all perpetrators of human rights abuses to justice.

**APPEALS TO:**

President Robert Mugabe, Office of the President, Private Bag 7700, Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

**Fax: + 263 4 728 799 / 708 557**

Minister of Home Affairs

Dumiso Dabengwa, Ministry of Home Affairs, Private Bag 505D, Harare, Zimbabwe

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**Fax: + 263 4 726 716**

Minister of National Security

Dr Sidney T Sekeramayi, Ministry of National Security, Chaminuka Building,  
5th Street, Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**Fax: + 263 4 705 161**

Mr Augustine Chihuri, Commissioner of Police, Police Headquarters, PO Box  
8807, Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe

**Salutation: Dear Commissioner**

**Fax: + 263 4 728 768**

**COPIES TO:**

The Editor, *The Herald*, PO Box 396, Harare, Zimbabwe

The Editor, *The Standard*, PO Box 661730, Kopje, Harare, Zimbabwe

ZimRights, PO Box 3591, Harare, Zimbabwe

Amani Trust, PO Box 5465, Harare, Zimbabwe (Human rights organisation)

and to diplomatic representatives of Zimbabwe accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat,  
or your section office, if sending appeals after 1 June 2000.