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**Zimbabwe: High risk of human rights violations as international observers are leaving the country and military presence builds up**  
*Amnesty International is gravely concerned about the high risk of violence in the aftermath of the elections held on 9, 10 and 11 March 2002, especially in light of the departure of many international election observers.*

*On the basis of previous experience in Zimbabwe, the organization is concerned that there is a risk of attacks on perceived supporters of the opposition and of violence around any protests about the election results.*

*"The police should abide by international human rights standards when fulfilling their duties. Action should be taken to ensure that the post election period is free from the human rights abuses that have marred the run up to the presidential elections," Amnesty International said.*

*While many election observers leave the country, military presence is being built up in towns such as Bulawayo, Gweru and Kwekwe and human rights defenders are coming under increased threat, all of which raises serious concerns over the human rights situation in the country. "As such, the international community should maintain its active engagement with the Zimbabwe authorities to ensure that human rights violations are prevented," the organization added.*

*The army has been involved in a pattern of punishment beatings on members of communities who voted for the opposition in previous elections. The pattern of army involvement in carrying out reprisal beatings and torture against the Zimbabwean population was clear in the aftermath of previous elections in 1985 and 1990 as well as more*

recently in the June 2000 parliamentary elections when the army occupied Harare's high density suburbs whose residents voted for the opposition in overwhelming numbers. Similarly, after the 1998 food riots, army soldiers carried out house-to-house beatings of residents in those same suburbs. Amnesty International appeals to the Zimbabwean authorities not to use the military in reprisals against those perceived to have voted against the ruling party in the recent elections.

As many of the international observers leave, Amnesty International fears that opposition supporters, members of non-governmental organizations, employees of the independent press and other perceived opponents of the government are at risk, both immediately and in the event of any popular protest against the election results. Members of the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) youth brigades have been involved in serious human rights violations, including killings, torture and threats to physical safety of people perceived to be opposition supporters in the run up and during the elections.

"The Zimbabwe authorities should refrain from or allow the targeting of opposition supporters for any form of reprisal and that public demonstrations are policed impartially and in accordance with international standards," the organization urged.

"The Southern African Development Community (SADC), and in particular South Africa, should take firm action to press the Zimbabwe authorities to uphold the rule of law and prevent widespread human rights violations. The police must act professionally and in accordance with international human rights standards in maintaining order in this volatile period," Amnesty International said.

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