

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: AFR 46/033/2002 (Public)
News Service No: 75
25 April 2002

Zimbabwe: Amnesty International regrets inaction by United Nations Commission on Human Rights

Amnesty International today expressed its deep regret at the decision by members of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva to vote in favour of a "no-action motion" to avoid a discussion of a draft resolution on Zimbabwe during the 58th session of the UNCHR.

"The UN Commission on Human Rights is a forum in which human rights violations should be discussed in an open and cooperative way to establish accountability and work towards ending impunity", the organization said. "Voting items off the agenda of the Commission which relate to open, grave and flagrant violations of human rights will only contribute to the perpetuation of impunity which is the root cause for the ongoing violation of human rights in Zimbabwe and a threat to regional stability", Amnesty International added.

Amnesty International, with many other organizations, has impartially documented and reported numerous cases of killings, acts of torture, arbitrary arrests and discrimination on grounds of political opinion in Zimbabwe over the past years, including the period of the parliamentary elections in 2000 and the recent presidential elections in March 2002.

The draft resolution asked for government assurances "of full respect for freedom of opinion and expression, including freedom of the press in relation to all types of mass media". It also called for the UN's human rights experts to visit the country and carry out independent, impartial investigations into allegations of "political killings, acts of torture and widespread intimidation of opposition supporters and human rights activists by government supported militia". Following consultation with members of African delegations the draft text also recognised "the importance of fair, just and sustainable land reform".

The vote was narrowly split between 26 votes for the motion, 24 against it, and three abstentions. With the exception of Cameroon, abstaining, all African countries supported the motion, as did many Asian countries. The vote resulted in blocking the discussion on the draft resolution submitted by Spain on behalf of the European Union.

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