

Amnesty International

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Open letter to His Excellency President Zuma

Your Excellency,

We, the Directors of African Amnesty International chapters, are writing to appeal to you to use your influence to ensure that every Zimbabwean can participate in the country's upcoming elections without fear of violence, harassment and intimidation. South Africa, as a key member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), played a critical role in easing the tension following Zimbabwe's last presidential election in June 2008 which paved the way for a Government of National Unity. Extreme violence marked those last elections: at least 200 people were killed, over 10,000 injured and 28,000 were forced to flee their homes. Thousands fled to neighbouring countries.

Zimbabwe's security forces were heavily implicated in orchestrating and carrying out the violence and the trauma of those events is still felt amongst the people. The 31 July elections take place against a backdrop of harassment of human rights defenders in the country. In recent months Amnesty International has documented a spate of arrests of human rights defenders, as well as raids on the offices of some of Zimbabwe's most prominent civil society organisations.

We know that no one wants a repeat of the violence seen in 2008 and SADC has the power to ensure that this does not happen again. Specifically, we call on SADC leaders to ensure Zimbabwe lives up to its obligations under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights in the lead-up to the election by:

- ensuring that SADC election observers deployed for the election document and respond to any allegations of human rights violations;
- taking a firm stance against state-sponsored violence and investigating any reports of human rights violations by the security forces;
- working with the Zimbabwean authorities to create an environment in which human rights defenders can monitor and promote human rights without fear of harassment or arbitrary arrest.

Amnesty International believes that peaceful elections can be achieved in Zimbabwe if SADC takes a firm position against violations of the rights to freedom of expression, association and

peaceful assembly. No Zimbabwean should be tortured, harassed, intimidated or forced into hiding for their real or perceived political affiliation.
SADC leaders should stand up for the rights of those victimised for exercising their internationally recognised human rights.

Yours sincerely

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