

AI Index: PRE 01/176/2011  
01 April 2011

## **Zimbabwean human rights leader charged as crackdown continues**

The Zimbabwean police authorities must end the systematic harassment and intimidation of human rights groups, Amnesty International said today after an NGO leader became the latest activist targeted with politically motivated charges.

Abel Chikomo, director of the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, was on Wednesday charged with running an illegal organization.

"The charges against Abel Chikomo appear to be part of an orchestrated strategy by the Zimbabwean police and other state security organizations to silence critics of their human rights record," said Michelle Kagari, Amnesty International's deputy director for Africa.

"The charges against him must be dropped immediately."

Since the beginning of February, Chikomo has been under police investigation and subject to regular interrogation, mainly on his organization's work on transitional justice.

The police have alleged that he has been managing and controlling the operations of an illegal Private and Voluntary Organisations (PVO) - charges he denies.

Organizations registered as common law associations, as provided for under Section 89 of the constitution of Zimbabwe, are supposed to be exempt from registration under the PVO Act.

"Police and other state security organizations in Zimbabwe are obliged to observe the country's obligation to respect the rights of human rights defenders provided under international law," said Kagari.

The charges against Chikomo follow a recent increase in the numbers of human rights activists facing arbitrary arrest and unlawful detention for conducting their legitimate work.

In February, 45 activists were charged with treason for watching videos clips of events in Egypt and Tunisia. Thirty-nine of the activists were later acquitted but the remaining six who were released on bail could face the death penalty if convicted.

In Bulawayo, the leaders of the activist organization Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), Jenni Williams and Magodonga Mahlangu, have been forced to go into hiding following threats of arbitrary arrest and prolonged detention.