

Appeal by the Secretary General of Amnesty International END STATE-SPONSORED VIOLENCE IN ZIMBABWE

At the time of Zimbabwe's 28th anniversary of independence, Amnesty International is deeply concerned about reports of the deteriorating human rights situation in Zimbabwe following presidential, parliamentary and local government elections which took place on 29 March 2008. The organization is particularly concerned about apparent retribution attacks against opposition supporters in rural areas, townships and farms across the country. Victims allege that they have been assaulted by soldiers, police, so-called "war veterans" and supporters of the ruling party, ZANU-PF, and have been accused of not having voted "correctly."

These assaults appear to be targeted at people in rural areas and low income suburbs where the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) seems to have gained more votes than the ruling ZANU-PF party. For example,

On 6 April, about 10 soldiers and two people dressed in police uniform, reportedly went to the home of a known MDC activist in Gweru, assaulted him with sticks and kicked him and two of his friends. The activists sustained injuries and required medical treatment.

On 11 April, a man was attacked in his shop in Mashonaland East Province by persons believed to be ZANU-PF supporters who reportedly broke into his shop, dragged him out the building and accused him of being an MDC member. The victim alleges that the ZANU-PF youth stole groceries from his shop and that they burned grass on both of his hands before beating his hands and back with wooden poles. The victim sustained injuries including burns to both of his hands and his left arm as well as broken bones in one of his arms and in both of his hands.

Though some victims have reported these crimes to the police, no arrests have been reported and it appears that perpetrators continue to commit abuses with impunity.

Violations of national and international law

These assaults violate both national and international human rights law. Section 15(1) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe states: "No person shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading punishment or other such treatment."

Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment are prohibited absolutely under international law, for example under Article 5 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Zimbabwe is a state party to both instruments.

It is also widely agreed that a state has violated the prohibition on torture and other ill-treatment not only when a state official physically commits the act, but also when such an act is committed at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity.

To President Robert Mugabe...

I call on you in your capacity as head of state and as leader of the ruling ZANU-PF party to denounce and bring to an end all human rights abuses, including violent attacks by soldiers, police, “war veterans” and ZANU-PF supporters.

I am appealing to you to bring about a prompt, independent and impartial investigation into the reported acts of human rights abuses, including all reports of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and to bring to justice all suspected perpetrators.

To the Commissioner-General of Police, Augustine Chihuri, and Army Commander, General Constantine Chiwenga...

I call on the Commissioner-General of Police and the Zimbabwe National Army Commander to bring an immediate end to human rights violations being perpetrated directly or condoned by police officers and soldiers.

I urge you to ensure that all allegations of police and military involvement in human rights abuses including violent attacks on individuals are promptly, independently and impartially investigated. The Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and the Zimbabwe National Army must cooperate fully with investigations. Those suspected of involvement must be brought to justice in proceedings which meet international standards of fairness. Victims must be awarded full reparations in accordance with international standards.

Police officers and soldiers should operate in a non-partisan manner and respect human rights law. They should act to prevent human rights abuses, not perpetrate them or allow a climate of impunity for others who may be responsible.

To Jabulani Sibanda, Chairperson of the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association...

I call on you to publicly call on your members to end immediately all acts of violence against real or suspected supporters of the political opposition. The alleged abuses by members of your organization may constitute crimes under national and international law. Those committing the abuses as well as those instigating them should be held accountable.

To Heads of states and governments of the Southern African Development Community (SADC)...

Amnesty International welcomes the emergency summit held by SADC in Lusaka on 12 April but urges you to redouble your diplomatic efforts to avoid further deterioration of the human rights situation in Zimbabwe. I call on you to acknowledge publicly and express concern at the human rights abuses being perpetrated by members of state security organizations, “war veterans”, and ZANU-PF supporters.

The Zimbabwean authorities have operated in violation of regional and international human rights law and standards for too long. Urgent action is needed to end human rights abuses, hold perpetrators accountable and ensure reparation for the victims.

Irene Khan
Secretary General