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MEDIA ADVISORY

ZIMBABWE

Constitutional reform -- an opportunity to strengthen human rights protection

"The drafting of a new constitution for Zimbabwe is a unique opportunity to establish human rights at the heart of its political life."

On 29 November 1999, Zimbabwe's Constitutional Commission delivered its draft constitution to President Mugabe for consideration. In a new report launched today in Harare, Amnesty International analyses the human rights provisions in the draft constitution and makes recommendations for the inclusion of additional human rights safeguards during the final stage of its revision and before it is put to popular referendum..

Amnesty International concludes that the draft constitution represents major human rights improvements compared to the present constitution -- particularly with regards to women's rights. However, it believes that there are still a number of discrepancies between Zimbabwe's human rights obligations under international law and the current draft of the constitution.

Amnesty International urges the President of Zimbabwe to ensure that the final draft of the constitution complies with the country's human rights obligations under international law before it is presented to the people of Zimbabwe for ratification in a referendum.

Among the human rights organization's recommendations to the President are that the draft of the constitution should ensure:

- that Zimbabwe's international treaty obligations prevail in conflicts with national law;
- that the death penalty is abolished;
- that evidence elicited through torture is not admissible in court;
- that corporal punishment for children is prohibited;
- that an individual is not discriminated against because of his/her sexual orientation;
- that the right to appeal judicial decisions is guaranteed unconditionally;
- that children under the age of 18 are protected from recruitment into the armed forces.

ENDS.../

For more information or to receive a copy of the report *Constitutional reform -- Zimbabwe's chance to change their human rights record*, please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on + 44 171 413 5566 or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org> •••