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Zimbabwe: More than 250 women arrested - some badly beaten

Amnesty International is outraged at the arrest of more than 250 women after Zimbabwe police broke up a peaceful post-election prayer gathering in Harare yesterday evening.

According to reports received by Amnesty International, police beat several of the women during and after arrest. Some were beaten on their buttocks after being made to lie on the ground; others were beaten while getting out of police vehicles, apparently for not moving fast enough. A number of the women are reported to be badly injured.

The prayer gathering was organised by the grassroots group, Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), in Harare's Africa Unity Square.

The women were held overnight at Harare Central Police Station - many of them in the open air. Amnesty International's information is that several of the women are elderly and some had children taken into custody with them.

"This is the fourth time WOZA activists have been arrested this year, simply for engaging in peaceful protest. These are incredibly brave women standing up to repression with dignity," said Kolawole Olaniyan, Director of Amnesty International's Africa Programme.

"Their treatment at the hands of the Zimbabwe police has been appalling. We are deeply concerned about the medical condition of those who were injured and call on the Zimbabwe authorities to launch an immediate and independent investigation into the police operation."

The women are being released today having been pressurised into paying 'admission of guilt' fines under the Road Traffic Act, despite the fact that there is no traffic in Africa Unity Square. Lawyers report that the women were told that if they did not pay fines they would remain in detention until Monday, when courts re-open, to face charges under the repressive Public Order and Security Act (POSA).

Several women have been taken to hospital to receive treatment for their injuries, but further information about their condition is not yet available.

"Amnesty International believes that the women's pleas of guilt have been elicited under duress, and strongly condemns the abuse of due process and the rule of law by the Zimbabwe police," said Kolawole Olaniyan.

Background

Over the past two years WOZA activities have been repeatedly arrested for engaging in peaceful demonstrations against the worsening economic, social and human rights situation in Zimbabwe.

Amnesty International has repeatedly condemned POSA as a repressive law which violates internationally recognised human rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly guaranteed under the African Charter and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) - to which Zimbabwe is a state party.

Public Document

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