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Zimbabwe: Southern African leaders must condemn human rights abuse

Amnesty International (AI) members in the southern African region have written to their leaders calling on them to publicly and jointly condemn the Government of Zimbabwe for its violation of human rights.

Letters have been sent to Heads of State and Government attending the summit of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in Mauritius on 16 August.

"The SADC treaty obliges member states to act in accordance with principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, so the leaders of southern Africa have a special responsibility to respond to the human rights crisis in Zimbabwe. Although Zimbabwe has been discussed at SADC summits for the last three years, there has been no improvement in the human rights situation," the AI members said.

The letters denounce a series of grave human rights abuses in Zimbabwe including:

- Repressive laws that are used to criminalize peaceful gatherings, as well as shut down independent media outlets and non-governmental organizations;
- Government moves to end international food aid distribution, despite independent warnings that millions of Zimbabweans will need food aid in the coming year;
- Systematic Government attacks on the independence of judges and lawyers;
- Failure to investigate widespread allegations of torture and ill-treatment, including rape, committed by security forces and "youth" militia.

"Evidence suggests that an escalation in repression in Zimbabwe is already underway ahead of parliamentary elections. We are urging SADC leaders to use this summit to demonstrate their commitment to protect human rights and to hold governments accountable in the SADC region," the AI members said.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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