

Take action: Stop harassment of activists Zimbabwe

Date: 22/03/2007

Web Action: WA 009/07

Index: AFR 46/005/2007

On 11 March 2007, about 50 activists were arrested in Zimbabwe after attempting to attend a prayer meeting in defiance of a three-month ban imposed by the authorities. The activists, including leaders of the main opposition party in Zimbabwe -- the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) -- were severely beaten during arrest and later tortured while in police custody.

Amnesty International has received numerous reports of continuing police harassment of the political opposition, lawyers and civil society groups.

On 21 March, Amnesty International sent a letter to Zimbabwe's President, Robert Mugabe, and the Minister of Home Affairs, Kembo Mohadi, calling on the government to:

- lift immediately the ban on public meetings imposed by police on 20 February 2007. Amnesty International believes that the ban is in breach of Zimbabwe's international, regional and national obligations to respect and protect the right to freedom of expression, association and assembly.
- end the human rights violations by the police and other law enforcement officials and ensure that police officers abide by the highest standards of professionalism and respect for human rights. The Government of Zimbabwe must cease to use the police and other law enforcement officials for political purposes, including for the suppression of peaceful public assemblies and the persecution of opposition parties and human rights defenders.
- ensure that the police conduct their duties in a manner consistent with respect for internationally and regionally recognised standards of human rights and policing, without discrimination. Police officers should operate in a manner consistent with international human rights law and standards, including the Southern African Regional Police Chiefs Co-operation Organisation (SARPPCO) Code of Conduct for Police Officials, Article 1 of which states that: *"In the performance of their duties, police officials shall respect and protect human dignity and maintain and uphold all human rights for all persons."*
- institute an immediate, impartial and independent investigation of the killing by riot police of Gift Tandare on 11 March, the shootings of three people by police on 13 March and allegations of excessive use of force by police while dispersing demonstrators attempting to attend the public meeting on 11 March. Those suspected to be responsible must be brought to justice.
- institute an immediate, impartial and independent investigation into the allegations of torture of Movement for Democratic Change and civil society leaders and their supporters. Those suspected to be responsible must be brought to justice without further delay.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned that the government of Zimbabwe has failed to address the human rights concerns that have arisen since 11 March 2007.

The continued harassment by the police of the political opposition and lawyers following the events of 11 March 2007 reflects a pattern of harassment of political opposition, lawyers and human rights defenders, documented by Amnesty International since 2000.

Please send appeals to the Chairperson of the African Union and the Southern African Development Community to call on the government of Zimbabwe to end human rights violations in Zimbabwe.

Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my grave concern about the human rights situation in Zimbabwe following the state's response to attempts by political opposition and civil society leaders and supporters to attend a meeting organised in protest against the police ban of a prayer meeting on Sunday 11 March 2007.

There are corroborated reports that police used excessive force and misused lethal force against unarmed demonstrators. In some cases, while in police custody, activists were subjected to severe beatings amounting to torture.

Such incidents are continuing as of 20 March 2007 and appear to amount to breaches of Zimbabwe's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and are contrary to Zimbabwe's undertakings under the Constitutive Act of the African Union.

I appeal to you to use your good offices to remind the government of Zimbabwe of its regional human rights obligations and to encourage a process leading to an impartial and independent investigation of the killing on 11 March 2007 of Gift Tandare, the misuse of lethal force by police against participants at the protest meeting on 11 March and against mourners at Gift Tandare's funeral on 13 March and into allegations of torture and ill-treatment of detained protesters. The results of such investigations should be made public and alleged perpetrators brought to justice.

I also appeal to you to seek assurances that the Zimbabwe Republic Police conduct their duties in a manner consistent with respect for internationally and regionally recognised standards of human rights and policing, without discrimination. To restore public confidence in the Zimbabwe Republic Police, police officers should operate in a manner consistent with international human rights law and standards, including the Southern African Regional Police Chiefs Co-operation Organisation (SARPCCO) Code of Conduct for Police Officials, Article 1 of which states that: "*In the performance of their duties, police officials shall respect and protect human dignity and maintain and uphold all human rights for all persons.*"

Finally, I believe that the blanket ban on public meetings is a violation of regional human rights guarantees of the rights to freedom of assembly, association and expression. I appeal to you to use all possible influence to have the ban lifted without delay.

Yours sincerely,

Please send appeals to:

His Excellency John Kufuor, Chairperson of the African Union

Office of the President

The Castle

Osu

PO Box 1627

Accra

Ghana

Salutation: Your Excellency

**President Jakaya Kikwete, Chair of the organ on politics, defence and security of
Southern African Development Community**

SADC Secretariat

SADC House

Private Bag 0095

Gaborone
Botswana
Fax: +267 3972 848
Salutation: Your Excellency