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Zimbabwe: Climate of fear persists despite deal; violence must not be pardoned

As the Zimbabwean government and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) prepare to enter power-sharing talks, Amnesty International called on both parties to ensure there are no pardons for those who committed human rights violations in the post-election period.

“There can be no lasting political solution to the crisis in Zimbabwe without addressing past human rights violations. While human rights violations must end immediately, investigations must be carried out and alleged perpetrators brought to justice,” said Amnesty International.

Amnesty International continues to receive reports of ongoing political violence and harassment, particularly in rural areas. Even since the signing of Monday’s ‘memorandum of understanding’ by the ruling party and opposition, victims of political violence have had to seek medical treatment for injuries sustained in attacks.

On 22 July, an MDC official from a rural constituency south of Harare who had been in hiding was allegedly attacked while he walked to work with a youth in the early hours of the morning. They were both abducted by suspected supporters of the ruling party and thoroughly beaten on the buttocks, arms, legs and feet. According to reports, their abductors said they had been looking for the MDC official, and that nowhere was safe. Both the MDC official and the youth had to seek medical treatment as a result of injuries sustained.

Though some bases from which ‘war veterans’ and other ZANU-PF supporters launched attacks against opposition supporters have been dismantled, some in rural areas including in Mashonaland West, Central and East provinces, still remain.

“The attacks that have killed as many as 150, injured thousands and displaced tens of thousands over the last several months -- and which continue to take place -- must not be swept under the carpet in the interest of finding a short-term political solution,” said Amnesty International. “This would store up problems for further down the road.”

While attempts are being made by all Zimbabwean political parties -- and the Southern African Development Community, African Union and United Nations -- to address the political and economic crisis, Amnesty International said that important questions of justice and impunity were not explicitly tackled in the ‘memorandum of understanding’ signed on Monday.

“Any future deal between the parties should not include amnesties, pardons or any other measures that would prevent the emergence of the truth, a final judicial determination of guilt or non-guilt, and full reparations to victims and their families.”

In signing the memorandum, the ruling party and opposition committed themselves to condemning the promotion and use of violence and to taking all measures necessary to ensure that the structures and institutions it controls are not engaged in acts of violence.

Despite the latest political developments, Amnesty International remains concerned that Zimbabwe is still blanketed in a climate of fear. The government must put an immediate end to all acts of intimidation, arbitrary arrest and torture perpetrated state and non-state actors against human rights defenders and political activists, particularly in rural areas. All bases from which torture and ill-treatment is being carried out must be closed immediately and alleged perpetrators of human rights violations must be brought to justice.

Note to editors:

Protection of freedom expression, as well as freedom association and assembly is provided for under section 20 and 21 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe as state a party to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights has an obligation to respect and protect these rights.