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Zimbabwe: End harassment, torture and intimidation of opposition activists

Amnesty International expressed outrage at today's dramatic events in Zimbabwe, including the arrest and subsequent release of Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) leader Morgan Tsvangirai. The organization called for an end to the continued harassment, torture and intimidation of opposition activists in Zimbabwe.

"We are very concerned by reports of continuing brutal attacks on opposition activists in Zimbabwe and call on the government to stop all acts of violence and intimidation against opposition activists," said Kolawole Olaniyan, Director of Amnesty International's Africa Programme.

The organization also called on African leaders meeting in the region to take action in response to today's events.

"African leaders have allowed the government of Zimbabwe to operate outside the international human rights framework by deciding to adopt a strategy of quiet diplomacy -- a tactic that in this case has left the victims of human rights violations to suffer without protection," said Olaniyan.

"Southern African Development Community (SADC) leaders meeting in Tanzania must now send an unequivocal message to the government of Zimbabwe that human rights violations in that country will no longer be tolerated."

Amnesty International obtained the following information regarding recent attacks on opposition activists in Zimbabwe:

Morgan Tsvangirai, President of Zimbabwe's opposition MDC party, was arrested today at his office in Harare together with at least 20 MDC party workers and members. Lawyers were denied access to those arrested and some were also threatened with arrest. Police are reported to have closed all roads leading to the offices and eyewitnesses report seeing police loading furniture into trucks. Tsvangirai was subsequently released.

In a raid early this morning police arrested Paul Madzore and his wife Melody Kuzvinetsa at their home. They also assaulted other occupants in the house. Paul Madzore is a Member of Parliament (MP) for Glen View, a constituency in Harare. Their whereabouts are unknown.

Also early today, police arrested Ian Makone and his wife Theresa Makone at their Borrowdale home in Harare. Ian Makone is a member of the MDC's National Executive Committee. Theresa Makone is the MDC chairperson for Mashonaland East Province.

Police are also reported to have today arrested Pineal Denga and his wife in Marondera. Pineal Denga is the organising secretary of the MDC in Mashonaland East province. The couple's whereabouts are also unknown.

At 12.00 pm on 27 March, Last Maengahama was abducted outside the Borrowdale Shopping Centre in Harare by people in plain clothes who are believed to be security agents. Maengahama was returning from a memorial service for Gift Tandare, an activist who was shot dead by police in Harare on 11 March 2007. Maengahama is also an MDC activist. He was later dumped by his abductors in Mutorashanga, some 100 kilometres from Harare. He had been severely beaten and is currently receiving medical treatment at a private hospital in Harare.

Amnesty International called on the Zimbabwean government to ensure that all those arrested have immediate access to lawyers, doctors and their families and are promptly brought to court to review the legality of their detention.

The government must also guarantee their safety and well-being and immediately investigate any allegations of torture.

"Anyone detained solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression or assembly must be immediately and unconditionally released," said Olaniyan.

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