



PRESS STATEMENT
17 April 2008

VIOLENT RETRIBUTIVE ACTION AGAINST INNOCENT ZIMBABWEANS BY STATE AGENTS ON THE INCREASE

Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) is gravely concerned at the increasing incidences of confirmed human rights violations currently being perpetrated by or with the acquiescence of the state on defenceless Zimbabweans countrywide.

Since 14 April 2008, at least 150 people have been arrested and are currently detained in custody at Harare Central police station alone. The recent arrests and continuing violations of fundamental rights and freedoms have been exacerbated by state actors who are working hand-in-hand with the ruling ZANU PF party militia to unleash their coercive apparatus on an innocent electorate. This campaign of terror has been widespread across the country and is being perpetrated against any person who is suspected to have cast their vote against the ruling party, as well as their families.

Despite the fact that the Zimbabwean Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act (CPEA) categorically states that powers of arrest are vested in the police and other peace officers, the general trend confirmed by ZLHR lawyers attending to victims has been the abduction of individuals from their homes by members of the military (in uniform and plain clothes), as well as the ZANU PF youth and militia. Recently most of the inmates detained at the police station have been arrested by the military.

Before these illegal arrests by the military, from areas around Harare, the victims have been subjected to torture and other inhuman and degrading treatment.

Nine (9) people from a residential area, Budiriro, were abducted from the funeral of Anna Mazhanidza by members of the Zimbabwe Republic Police Support Unit and other people suspected to be members of the Zimbabwe National Army who were dressed in plain clothes. Eight (8) people were also picked up from another residential area, Mabvuku. They were accused of obstructing the free movement of traffic by placing stones in the road. Some of the arrested individuals include the newly elected Member of the House of Assembly, Shepherd Madamombe. These abductions were effected by suspected plain clothes members of the Zimbabwe Republic Police and the ruling party militia.

In St Mary's at least 20 people, including former Mayor, Misheck Shoko, and a recently elected councillor, Stephen Gomo, were abducted from their homes by plain clothes personnel who are believed to be members of the Zimbabwe National Army and the Zimbabwe Republic Police.

On 16 April 2008, during the early hours of the morning, 22 people were abducted by soldiers and ZANU PF youths from their homes in Epworth. During these abductions some of the people were assaulted with booted feet, and open hands all over the body. In some of the cases doors were forced open to enable the youths and members of the army to forcibly gain entry into the homes of the victims. Upon abduction, the victims were not informed of the charges levelled against them. After this inhuman treatment the victims were taken to police stations whereat the police again did not advise them of the charges being levelled against them.

Despite the fact that the police do not have an iota of evidence against targeted civilians, members of the army and ZANU PF youths have cast a dragnet in the streets of most of the high density suburbs around Harare. The arrests have been indiscriminate, based on political affiliation and in most instances where the people are remotely associated or are suspected of being associated with the Movement for Democratic Change.

In areas such as Bikita, Nyanga North, Mutoko, Gokwe, Mudzi, Chegutu and Mt Darwin the military has unleashed unabated attacks on innocent individuals since the beginning of the week.

Despite the fact that everyone has a right to participate in the government of the day through voting, it can be readily ascertained that most of the people have been victimised on the basis of their political affiliation. Areas such as Mutoko have become hot spots with confirmed reports of indiscriminate brutal assaults on people perceived to belong to the opposition party. A case in point is one campaign manager for the Movement for Democratic Change whose property was destroyed by members of ZANU PF. Some of the people have since looted his property and destroyed his livelihood, which include his crops and livestock. This looting continues unabated to date. The police, who are aware of the activities of the ZANU PF youths in this case, have turned a blind eye to the total breakdown of the rule of law in this area.

In certain areas around Harare's high density suburbs and outlying areas, members of the military have imposed curfews. As a result freedom of movement has been severely curtailed. During the early hours of the evening, anyone who is found in the streets has been subjected to inhuman and degrading punishment and has been accused of not observing the imposed curfew. Victims have been asked to crawl in the streets for distances that range up to 200 metres by soldiers. The targeted individuals include the elderly, youths and even breastfeeding mothers. There has been an overwhelming disrespect of persons and indiscriminate and unjustifiable destruction of property. At least 30 homes are believed to have been burnt down and some destroyed around the country.

By 19:00hrs on 17 April 2008, several groups of people were still being indiscriminately abducted, arrested from the streets and their homes around Harare.

ZLHR deplors this cruel and unacceptable retributive action. The dignity of human beings in Zimbabwe is paramount and nobody should be targeted for merely exercising her/his right to vote or due to a perceived political affiliation. Urgent action must be taken by the authorities to stop such atrocities and bring the perpetrators to book.

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