



PRESS STATEMENT
20 December 2006

USE OF POLICE TO PERSECUTE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) wishes to express its concern over the continued harassment of human rights defenders by the Zimbabwe Republic Police and other state agents.

ZLHR is aware that on 25 November 2006, at around 06h30, eight (8) police officers, four (4) of whom were in uniform, attended at the home of Bishop Levee Kadenge at Number 3, 4th Avenue, Mabelreign, Harare. The policemen told Bishop Kadenge he was under arrest for allegedly stealing cattle which he had moved to Chivhu. Bishop Kadenge had indeed moved some of his own cattle to his brother and nephew's home in Chivhu to assist them with their farming. One police officer forced Bishop Kadenge to change his clothes in his bedroom while watching him. The police officers then took the Bishop from his home and drove to his plot in Sandringham, some 75 km from Harare, to investigate the issue of the stolen cattle. Bishop Kadenge's wife who insisted on not leaving her husband's side was taken with them.

During the drive to Bishop Kadenge's Sandringham Plot the police officers interrogated him on why he was against the land reform programme. One of the police officers went through his cell phone, and asking him why he had the telephone numbers of certain individuals.

After establishing that Bishop Kadenge indeed had cattle at his plot the police officers insisted on driving to Chivhu, almost 200 km away, to see the eight cattle he had given to his brother and nephew. On the way to Chivhu the police officers were again interrogating Bishop Kadenge on his "negative" attitude about the land reform programme. In Beatrice the police officers stopped for a one-and-a-half-hour lunch, without any food being given to Bishop Kadenge and his wife, who had been made to leave their home without having eaten or taken any money. In Chivhu the police officers saw the eight cattle and could not prove their allegations that there had been three other stolen cattle; they however told Bishop Kadenge's brother that they would detain the Bishop because he had not shown them the permit for moving the cattle to Chivhu. The Bishop's brother promised to bring the permit to Harare.

The police officers drove back to Harare and arrived at around 00h45 on Sunday morning. Bishop Kadenge and his wife were made to sit in the police car at Harare Central Police Station for at almost 45 minutes. Bishop Kadenge and his wife were released at around 01h00 on Sunday morning and told to go home without being offered transport back, such that they had to ask their son to drive them home.

On Monday 27 November 2006 Bishop Kadenge and his brother attended at Harare Central Police Station with the permit for moving his cattle. After Bishop Kadenge and his wife had spent at least 18 hours in police custody, during which time the Bishop was interrogated, denied food, inhumanely treated and harassed he was told that there was no case against him and that he had been discharged.

ZLHR condemns the illegal arrest and effective kidnapping of Bishop Kadenge and his wife, which was clearly carried out for the purpose of harassing him and obtaining information from him. It is our belief and experience that this pretext of the alleged stealing of cattle was used to harass and persecute the Bishop due to his being a human rights defender who has challenged the state and government's violation of human rights.

The conduct of the Zimbabwe Republic Police and its police officers, including **officer G. Musonza of Harare Central Police Station and Sergeant Muchekesi, Stock Theft Section, Harare Central Police Station**, amounts to a violation of the rights of Bishop Kadenge and his wife, namely their right to liberty, presumption of innocence, protection of the law and protection from inhuman and degrading treatment, right to privacy and right to food and water.

ZLHR calls upon the Minister of Home Affairs, Commissioner of Police and Officer in Charge Harare Central Police Station to bring to account the police officers responsible for the harassment and violation of Bishop Kadenge and his wife's fundamental rights. Further, ZLHR calls upon the Zimbabwe Republic Police to respect due criminal procedure and stop arresting and detaining people for the purpose of investigating and obtaining information from them through duress. The rights of human rights defenders are also protected under the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, passed by resolution of the General Assembly, and to which the state has formally bound itself. Violations of provisions there under should cease with immediate effect.

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