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Subject: Protest leaders brutally assaulted: A statement from the MDC secretary-general

MDC Press Statement

The arrest yesterday of the leaders of the ZCTU and the MDC did not surprise us and as we pointed out was a gross violation of their constitutional right to freedom of assembly and association.

However, the extent of the physical harm and assault on them while in police custody is shocking and unacceptable. The police have engaged in a flagrant violation of the rights of those arrested. They were called two at a time into a cell at Matapi police station where five state security agents brutally assaulted them. They are in a sorry state. It was a brutal assault. There has been denial of access to legal help, denial of access to food and denial of access to medical help. The following are some of the excesses as recorded by the lawyers who visited them.

1. Lucia Matibenga (ZCTU vice president and MDC women's assembly chairperson)

She spent the night sitting at the charge office at Matapi police station without blankets and food. She was badly assaulted with batons and has a fractured hand. Her ears are bleeding. She has difficulty in hearing and breathing.

2. Wellington Chibhebhe (ZCTU secretary-general)

Badly assaulted. Suspected fracture and visible crack on head. Suspected fracture of both hands. Prostrate and heavily swollen. Needs urgent medical attention.

3. Lovemore Matombo (ZCTU President)

Badly assaulted on bums and legs. Cannot move. Is in visible physical pain. Urgently needs medical attention.

4. Ian Makone (MDC national executive member)

Brutally assaulted all over. Fainted thrice. Blood on his legs and unable to walk. Urgently needs medical attention.

5. Moses Ngondo (activist)

Fractured left arm. Cannot move. Swollen back-side. Urgently needs medical attention.

6. Toendepi Shonhe (MDC deputy organising secretary, Harare province)

Badly assaulted. Cannot move. Leg bleeding.

7. Dennis Chiwara (activist)

Badly assaulted. Leg injuries. Suspected broken ankle. Swollen all over. Urgently needs medical attention.

8. Tererai Todini (youth chairperson, MDC Mbare district)

Badly assaulted all over with fists and batons. Swollen all over.

9. Tonderai Nyahunzvi (activist)

Badly assaulted. Suspected fractured hand. Needs urgent medical attention.

10. Tichaona Basket

Badly assaulted. Injured back, ribs and head. Cannot sit up.

11. Stephen Mutasa Mutsipa

Horribly assaulted. injuries all over.

12. James Gumbi

Badly assaulted. Bleeding back and bums. Little movement.

13. Ngobizitha Khumalo

Badly assaulted, especially back, head and ribs. Passing blood-stained urine.

14. Rwapedza Chigwengwa

Badly assaulted. Swollen left arm and back. Urgently needs medical attention.

Over and above these victims of police brutality, lawyers have been denied access to the rest of the arrested members. For instance, the whereabouts of MDC national executive members Grace Kwinje and Kerry Kay remains unknown, although they were last seen at Harare central police station.

The situation of those injured is bad and a life could be lost if no urgent medical attention is provided. As if that is not enough, there are clearly no moves to take those arrested to the remand court.

Lawyers have filed an urgent application seeking access to their clients, medical help and an order to have their clients placed on remand. We are hopeful the application will be heard.

As MDC, we are seriously concerned about the state of our colleagues which remains an indictment on this unmitigated dictatorship. We are closely monitoring the situation.

Hon Tendai Biti
MDC Secretary-General