

22 September 2006

UA 253/06 **Torture/ill-treatment/fear of excessive use of force****ZIMBABWE** **Hundreds of protestors from the National Constitutional Assembly and other civil society groups**

Amnesty International is gravely concerned by an emerging pattern of human rights violations, including alleged torture and arbitrary detention, being perpetrated by police against hundreds of human rights defenders involved in peaceful demonstrations in recent days.

Demonstrations took place across the country on 11 September, 13 September and 20 September, led by civil society groups including Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA). On each occasion Amnesty International has received alarming reports that people have been arrested and detained as a consequence of exercising their right to peaceful demonstration. Some people have allegedly been severely beaten while in police custody, sustaining broken bones and head injuries.

As well as allegations of torture and other forms of ill-treatment, Amnesty International has also received reports that detainees have been denied access to their lawyers and adequate food and medical care while in police custody. Some have been held in deplorable conditions, including overcrowded cells, for prolonged periods.

On 20 September, more than 15 NCA members were reportedly ill-treated, including being beaten with sticks, while in police custody after being arrested during peaceful demonstrations in the city of Mutare. The police reportedly did not provide any food for these detainees. In total, approximately 170 NCA members were reportedly arrested and detained following peaceful demonstrations in the urban centres of Mutare, Harare, Gweru and Masvingo.

Also on 20 September four NCA members were allegedly abducted about two hours before planned demonstrations by supporters of the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), as they were passing ZANU-PF offices. All four were allegedly beaten on the soles of their feet and held captive in ZANU-PF offices during the demonstrations before being released later that day.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 14 September Amnesty International received credible reports that members of the ZCTU were severely beaten at Matapi Police Station in Harare following peaceful demonstrations. Hundreds of members of the ZCTU and WOZA were reported to be detained in Harare and other urban centres in Zimbabwe. Many were denied access to lawyers, adequate food and medical care.

On 11 September, over 100 WOZA members were reportedly arrested ahead of a planned peaceful sit-in at Town House in Harare, to protest against deteriorating services in Harare. Among those arrested and detained were allegedly five babies and their mothers, who were WOZA members, and a pregnant woman, who reportedly became unwell while in police custody. Many were detained for a prolonged period often in deplorable conditions. Amnesty International expressed serious concerns for the health and safety of all those detained (see UA 247/06, AFR 46/017/2006, 14 September 2006).

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing grave concern about reports that members of the NCA and the ZCTU have been subjected to torture or other forms of ill-treatment;
- urging the authorities to investigate these reports and bring to justice those responsible;

- expressing concern that many of those arrested and detained during demonstrations since 11 September have not had access to lawyers, adequate food or medical care;
- expressing concern that people have been arrested and detained solely for exercising or attempting to exercise their right to peaceful demonstration;
- urging the police authorities to exercise restraint and fully respect human rights when policing any public protest action;
- reminding the authorities that human rights defenders have a right to carry out their legitimate activities without any restrictions or fear or reprisals, as set out in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms).

APPEALS TO:

Police Commissioner Augustine Chihuri
Zimbabwe Republic Police
Police Headquarters
PO Box 8807
Causeway
Harare, Zimbabwe

Fax: +263 4 253 212 (please keep trying)

Salutation: Dear Commissioner

His Excellency President Robert G Mugabe
Office of the President
Munhumutapa Building

Samora Machel Avenue/ 3rd Street
Box 7700

Causeway
Harare, Zimbabwe

Fax: +263 4 734 644

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

National Constitutional Assembly
38 Herbert Chitepo Avenue
Harare, Zimbabwe

Women of Zimbabwe Arise
PO Box FM 701
Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions
PO Box 3549
Famona
Harare, Zimbabwe

and to diplomatic representatives of Zimbabwe accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 3 November 2006.