

URGENT ACTION

STAFF OF ZIMBABWE HUMAN RIGHTS NGO AT RISK

Zimbabwean police have classified a human rights group the Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP) as a “threat to state security”, prompting fears that the workers could be arrested for their legitimate work of monitoring and documenting human rights violations. The statement follows two searches of the ZPP’s office by police earlier in February.

Staff of the ZPP and other human rights defenders (HRDs) may be at risk of arrest and detention for their human rights work following reports of a statement made by the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP)’s Chief Spokesperson on 20 February: “ZRP has it on good authority that certain entities like the ZPP purport to be engaged in humanitarian work as an NGO whereas they are an illegal conduit to the regime change agenda by carrying out covert political activities tantamount to causing a threat to state security and violating the country’s laws.” In recent weeks several key human rights groups and activists have been subjected to searches, arbitrary arrests and what appear to be politically motivated prosecutions calculated at closing the space for civil society as the country prepares for a constitutional referendum and a watershed election.

The ZPP monitors human rights abuses through a country-wide network of community-based field monitors. Their head office in Harare was raided on 11 February by five police officers from the Law and Order Section of Harare Central police station, in possession of a warrant to search for “subversive material, documents, gadgets or recordings” and “illegal immigrants”. Police confiscated documents, mobile phone handsets, radios, files with donor information and computer floppy disks. Police returned to the ZPP office later on the night of 11 February entering the premises in violation of the warrant, which only permitted them to search during the day.

According to Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, elections could be held in July 2013. The lead-up to elections over the last decade has seen an increase in human rights violations, in particular severe restriction of rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and freedom of expression through state-sponsored violence and arbitrary arrests. In recent months a crackdown on HRDs has been manifested in police searches at offices and arbitrary arrests of HRDs. At least six organisations had their offices searched since August 2012, with two searches taking place in mid-February.

Please write immediately in English or your own language:

- Expressing concern that the police search of ZPP is the sixth search on an NGO in seven months, and calling for an end to police harassment that appears to be designed to frustrate the legitimate work of HRDs;
- Expressing concern about public statements made by police in relation to ZPP, and calling for police to publicly affirm that they will cease interference with the operations of ZPP and its staff,
- Calling for respect for internationally guaranteed rights to freedom of expression and association for all in Zimbabwe, in particular the right of everyone, individually and in association with others, to promote and strive for realization of human rights.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 9 APRIL 2013 TO:

Commissioner-General of Police
Augustine Chihuri
Zimbabwe Republic Police
P. O. Box 8807, Causeway
Harare, Zimbabwe
Fax: +263 4 253 212 (keep trying)
Salutation: Dear Commissioner-General

Officer in Charge
Harare Central Police station
Zimbabwe Republic Police
PO Box CY 154
Harare, Zimbabwe
Fax: + 263 4 754 176 (keep trying)
Salutation: Dear Officer in Charge

AND SOLIDARITY MESSAGES TO:

Zimbabwe Peace Project
PO Box BE 427
Belvedere, Harare
Zimbabwe
Suggested text: I am writing to express my solidarity with your human rights work

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In 2008, three ZPP staff members were abducted by men believed to be state security agents. The abductees included ZPP Director Jestina Mukoko, who was tortured during her detention. She was released into police custody after three weeks, before being arrested and charged with “attempting to recruit people for military training to trying to overthrow the government”. In September 2009 the Supreme Court ordered a permanent stay of criminal proceedings against Jestina Mukoko.

Since August 2012, police have raided the offices of six NGOs – the Zimbabwe Election Support Network, ZPP, National Youth Development Trust, Zimbabwe Human Rights Association, Counselling Services Unit, and Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe. Following the searches, police seized equipment including computers, mobile phones, and confidential project documents. Several HRDs are currently facing charges arising from the police raids.

The current targeting of ZPP and other human rights groups in Zimbabwe is consistent with past trends of systematic harassment and intimidation of NGOs within a pre-election context as the authorities seek to restrict their activities and access to communities. Zimbabwe is scheduled to have a referendum on a new constitution on 16 March 2013 which will be followed by a general election.

In December 2012, President Mugabe’s ZANU-PF party, at its 13th National People’s Conference, made a resolution to instruct “the Party to ensure that Government enforces the de- registration of errant NGOs deviating from their mandate.” Although under the Global Political Agreement the Ministry of Home Affairs is co-chaired by MDC-T and ZANU-PF, the latter party effectively controls the police. Amnesty International believes that the current wave of harassment and intimidation of HRDs may be in pursuance of ZANU-PF’s December resolution.

Name: Over 400 associates of the ZPP, including 36 staff at the organisation’s head office in Harare, members and community-based field workers

Gender m/f: both

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