



Zimbabwe - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 24 and 25 September 2012

Information on a youth group called Chipangano. Is it allied to ZANU-PF? Any there reports of the group being involved in political violence over the past 6 months?

An Amnesty International press release states:

“Amnesty International urges the Zimbabwe police to act with restraint and ensure members of the public are not placed at risk as they conduct a crack down on groups of people suspected to have been involved in recent outbreaks of violence in Harare.

On Wednesday the police arrested 308 people following clashes between soldiers and touts controlling minibus stations. Amnesty International believes that given the randomness of the police operation the detainees may include innocent members of the public who are at a high risk of being tortured.

[...]

The minibus touts, known as mandimbandimba,,are suspected to be linked to the notorious Chipangano gang and control most of the public bus ranks in Harare extorting money from minibus drivers. Chipangano has over the years used violence to wrestle control of many small businesses and market stalls across the capital. The gang is affiliated with President Mugabe’s Zanu-PF party and as a result has enjoyed relative impunity despite being accused of violence against members of the public” (Amnesty International (14 September 2012) *Zimbabwe: Members of the public at risk as police crack down on gang suspects*

This press release also states under the heading ‘Note for editors’:

“The Chipangano gang appears to have grown out of control with its leaders using their growing influence to enrich themselves through rent seeking activities mainly in the township of Mbare. In recent weeks ZANU-PF leaders, including the party’s secretary for administration, Didymus Mutasa have attempted to distance the party from the gang and to reign in its activities. In recent weeks one of the group leaders was questioned by police and released following an incident where municipal police demolishing illegal car sales businesses were fired at.” (Ibid)

Amnesty International’s annual report states:

“Chipangano, a gang linked to ZANU-PF, committed human rights abuses with total impunity in their base in Mbare and in other parts of Harare. On 23 July they invaded the Parliament building, disrupted a public hearing on the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission Bill, and beat several people, including a member of Parliament and a journalist. No one was arrested despite the

presence of the police.” (Amnesty International (24 May 2012) *Amnesty International Annual Report 2012 - Zimbabwe*)

This report also states:

“On 20 October two men, Lionel Girezha, aged 27, and Ngonidzashe China, aged 28, were arrested in the suburb of Mbare in Harare and charged with sodomy. They deny the charges. They were beaten by the people who reported them before being taken into police custody. When the trial started, members of the ZANU-PF-linked Chipangano gang harassed and threatened the lawyers with violence for representing people suspected of being gay. Police failed to protect the lawyers, who had to appeal to the High Court to have the location of the trial changed from Mbare.” (Ibid)

A report by SW Radio Africa states:

“The violent ZANU PF youth gang that has terrorised residents of Mbare suburb in Harare has reportedly started campaigning for the party, forcing innocent civilians to reveal their personal details and ordering them to vote for Robert Mugabe in the next election.

The Chipangano gang, who operate with impunity and with the support of top ZANU PF officials, have been regularly forcing local residents, vendors and passersby to attend ZANU PF rallies held on open grounds in the area.

The most recent incident occurred last Saturday at Number Five grounds near Mbare Netball Complex, where people with no identity documents were told to reveal their details to the group, on the promise that Chipangano would approach the Registrar General for help in registering them to vote.” (SW Radio Africa (13 April 2012) *Violent Chipangano Gang Campaigning for Zanu PF*)

This report also states:

“The activist said violence by Chipangano in Mbare has intensified but there has not been much coverage of incidents in the mainstream media. According to Chipere, the gang has gained so much power that even the police are too scared to interfere.” (Ibid)

Another report by SW Radio Africa states:

“The MDC-T said on Thursday there is an upsurge in violence countrywide and very little reaction from the police.

[...]

‘In Harare for example, market vendors in Mbare and Highfields are being targeted by Chipangano. This group led by Hubert Nyanhongo, (ZANU PF MP, Harare South) has confirmed that it is behind most of the violence in Harare,’ Mwonzora said.” (SW Radio Africa (5 April 2012) *MDC-T worried about upsurge in violence countrywide*)

Another report by SW Radio Africa states:

“The violent gang of ZANU PF youths known as Chipangano have reportedly taken over many council properties in Harare and are now collecting huge sums of money illegally from vendors and minibus drivers. According to NewsDay newspaper, Chipangano is practically running a “parallel Council”.

The gang started a few years ago as young hired guns that did the dirty work for politicians in Mbare during elections. But with impunity and support from police and top party officials, they ventured into illegal businesses like collecting fees from kombi drivers and market vendors in Harare.

It has now been reported that Chipangano has overtaken Harare’s City Council and are illegally collecting large sums of money from revenue sources that the council has authority over.

A council official reportedly admitted to paying Chipangano for water in buildings they had illegally taken over. Newsday reported that Charles Nyatsuro, who heads the Council’s Housing and Community Services Committee, described the situation in Harare as ‘chaos’.

George Makoni from the Centre for Community Development Zimbabwe told SW Radio Africa that the gang’s influence has spread from Mbare to other parts of the capital, including Mabvuku, Epworth and Chitungwiza.

‘They have now set up structures in other cities, calling themselves Chipangano Chinhoyi, Chipangano Karoi and they are terrorising people willy nilly. These people are sustained by violence and have nothing else to offer the electorate,’ Makoni said.” (SW Radio Africa (28 March 2012) *ZPF’s violent Chipangano gang running “parallel Council” in Harare*)

Another report by SW Radio Africa states:

“The MDC-T MP for Sunningdale in Harare, Margaret Matienga, says she was horrified that the terror group Chipangano brutally attacked her party supporters, including children, in the presence of armed police.

‘They just stood there and watched helplessly as Chipangano waged criminal terror on innocent civilians. One wonders what would have happened if the opposite happened. All the police cells would now be packed with MDC-T supporters,’ Matienga said.

Nine MDC-T members ended up needing hospital treatment on Saturday after the Jim Kunaka led terror group stormed a rally in Sunningdale and beat up people with logs and iron bars.

Kunaka has been implicated in a number of the groups’ murders, beatings and torture cases, but none of the crimes linked to the group have ever been investigated by the police so far.

‘Seven men and two women suffered various degrees of injuries, and at least one of the men was left for dead when he was hit in the head with an iron bar,’ Matienga said. ” (SW Radio Africa (12 March 2012) *Police do nothing to stop Chipangano violence*)

Another report by SW Radio Africa states:

“Police in Harare have launched a city-wide crackdown on a gang linked to the notorious Chipangano group, arresting more than 300 people since Wednesday.

The operation has targeted suspected members of the 'mandimbandimba', who pose as touts and rank marshals at bus ranks across the city and use intimidation and harassment to force minibus drivers to hand over 'protection fees'.

This intimidation has also boiled over into violence, and last week scores of minibus drivers and some passers-by were assaulted at the Charge Office bus rank over the fees. It's understood that a soldier was one of the victims of the attack, and earlier this week a group of 20 soldiers exacted their revenge, indiscriminately beating up touts, rank marshals and passersby at the same bus rank.” (SW Radio Africa (15 September 2012) *Zimbabwean police arrest 300 members linked to ZANU PF youth militia gang*)

This report also states:

“The group has been repeatedly linked to the ZANU PF youth militia-fronted Chipangano gang, who have taken over control of market stalls and bus ranks across the capital. ZANU PF has previously turned a blind eye to the terror tactics employed by the youth gang, who have led a campaign of violence against Harare residents and perceived opposition supporters for years.

But the gang is understood to be out of control and Muchemwa reported Thursday that Harare residents are questioning why the usually partisan police are clamping down on the gang.

‘People are wondering why this is happening, because they have been doing this for years. Many believe this is a sign of ZANU PF infighting, with one faction vying for Chipangano's heads,’ Muchemwa reported.” (Ibid)

The Zimbabwe Peace Project Monthly Monitor of July 2012 states:

“On 12 July, about fifteen ZANU-PF youths suspected to be members of the notorious Chipangano gang harassed and displaced a female dance group owner from her house in Mbare accusing her of performing with her dance group at Harare Residents Trust meeting held earlier at Stodart Hall, the trust is accused of supporting MDC-T.” (Zimbabwe Peace Project (July 2012) *Monthly Monitor*)

The Zimbabwe Peace Project Monthly Monitor of February 2012 states:

“A number of people had their rights violated during President Robert Mugabe's birthday celebrations which were held at Sakubva Stadium on February 25. Commuter bus operators were forced by Zanu PF youths to ferry people to the stadium free of charge between 0700 am to around 1100hrs on the day of the celebrations. The youths were reportedly supported

by the Chipangano terror gang from Mbare whose fellow colleagues had earlier on Friday 23 been arrested in Rusape for public violence on their way to Mutare.” (Zimbabwe Peace Project (February 2012) *Monthly Monitor*, p. 4)

This Monthly Monitor also states:

“The Zanu PF Chipangano militia group allegedly stopped the construction of a service station and food outlet in Mbare accusing the businessman behind the venture of belonging to the MDC-T. Chipangano is arguing that only Zanu PF supporters should be allowed to invest in Mbare. This is despite a High Court order ordering the victim to go ahead with the construction.” (Ibid, p. 6)

Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) *Ballot Update* states:

“The notorious Chipangano group which has continued to violate citizens’ rights to free speech, assembly has escalated its operations in 2012. ZESN notes with concern the group’s disturbance of MDC meetings and rallies. The youth militia is also threatening people not to vote for the MDC as this will have great repercussions for them. While the GPA provides for the restoration of freedoms by parties to canvass for support and to organise, this has been largely curtailed in Mbare and other surrounding constituencies by the activities of this group. The police have done nothing to put a halt to this group, consequently, they have become a law unto themselves. ZESN continues to call for the disbanding of the group as it has debilitating effects on respect for diversity, political tolerance, freedom of assembly, association among others.” (Zimbabwe Election Support Network (Issue 2: February-March 2012) *Ballot Update*, p. 7)

A report by the Zimbabwe Independent states:

“Zanu PF youths have confirmed that the notorious Chipangano militia that has terrorised MDC supporters and commuter kombi operators in Harare has the backing of senior party officials.

Despite senior Harare Zanu PF officials disowning the terror group, Chipangano members who spoke to the Zimbabwe Independent on condition of anonymity yesterday, said the group has been in existence since 2000 with its major objective being to deal with perceived Zanu PF enemies.

The group's members said former Mbare MP Tendai Savanhu, who lost to Piniel Denga of the MDC-T in 2008, provided the gang with resources to sustain its terror campaigns on behalf of Zanu PF. Savanhu has denied links to Chipangano. Zanu PF Harare youth chairperson Jim Kunaka was in charge of deploying the gang's rank marshals at Harare's commuter ranks although he has also denied such links.

‘Kunaka has a say in almost every rank that operates in Harare. A marshal can't operate at a rank without his approval,’ said one gang member.” (Zimbabwe Independent (7 September 2012) *'Chipangano Is Zanu-PF'*)

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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