



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice
Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe – ZWE39318– Ndebele –
Discrimination
26 September 2011

1. Deleted.

2. What is the level and type of discrimination directed against Ndebele people in Zimbabwe, if any? Why are Ndebele discriminated against and by whom? Is this concentrated in certain regions?

The Ndebele are Zimbabwe's largest ethnic minority, constituting approximately 14 per cent of the population.¹ The Ndebele are related to the Zulu of South Africa and live largely in Matabeleland,² a stronghold of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).³

In the past, the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government largely represented the majority Shona ethnic group and grossly mistreated the Ndebele.⁴ Between 1983 and 1987, approximately 20,000 Ndebele men, women and children were killed in the so-called Gukurahundi Massacres by Shona soldiers in the 5th Brigade of the Zimbabwe National Army. The 5th Brigade was then under the command of Emmerson Mnangagwa, one of the frontrunners to succeed Robert Mugabe as head of ZANU-PF. As a consequence of these massacres, ethnic Ndebele generally do not support ZANU-PF.⁵ Since the Gukurahundi killings, there have been no reported killings of persons targeted because of their Ndebele ethnicity. Indeed, Robert Mugabe has expressed regret at the events of the 1980s, describing them as a “moment of madness”.⁶

Although political affiliation and ethnicity are no longer as closely linked, tensions between the two ethnic groups remain,⁷ and the Ndebele still widely perceive themselves to be marginalised by the Shona-dominated ZANU-PF party.⁸ Nevertheless, it can be difficult to

¹ US Department of State 2011, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2010 – Zimbabwe*, 8 April, Section 6

² Olson, J.S. 1996, *The Peoples of Africa; An Ethnohistorical Dictionary*, Greenwood Press, Westport, p.423 (MRT-RRT Library)

³ Freedom House 2010, *Freedom in the World – Zimbabwe (2010)*, Freedom House website, June <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2010&country=7952> – Accessed 10 September 2010

⁴ Minority Rights Group International 2011, *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2011 – Events of 2010*, July, p.90

⁵ Ploch, L. 2010, *Zimbabwe: Background*, Congressional Research Service, 8 July, pp.7-8

⁶ Matibe, P. 2010, 'Zimbabwe: Land – Zanu PF Tool in Suppressing Dissent', *All Africa Global Media*, source: *Zimbabwe Independent*, 4 February <http://allafrica.com/stories/201002050853.html> – Accessed 16 September 2010

⁷ Minority Rights Group International 2011, *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2011 – Events of 2010*, July, p.91

⁸ US Department of State 2011, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2010 – Zimbabwe*, 8 April, Section 6

separate ethnic discrimination from attempts to suppress opposition to ZANU-PF.^{9 10} For example, as a stronghold of the MDC Matabeleland is often targeted by security forces. The predominantly Ndebele residents reportedly suffer political and economic discrimination,¹¹ although such treatment could be based on political affiliation rather than ethnicity.

In 2003 the Minorities at Risk project noted “massive unemployment and general social destitution” in Matabeleland. It stated that “although there are no restrictions to high office, civil servants in Matabeleland are disproportionately Shona, and do not even speak Ndebele”.¹² However, high unemployment is not confined to Matabeleland; most estimates place the country’s unemployment figure at 95 per cent.^{13 14} State employment is therefore likely to be determined by loyalty to ZANU-PF, rather than ethnicity. Furthermore, one potential candidate for the ZANU-PF leadership, John Nkomo, is Ndebele, although he is not considered to be a frontrunner.¹⁵

The Ndebele appear to be highly organised politically. The 2005 split within the MDC saw the Ndebele bloc, led by Secretary-General Welshman Ncube, siding with what became the MDC-M.¹⁶ A number of Ndebele from ZANU-PF have also sought to re-establish the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU).¹⁷ A similar attempt was made following the death of former ZAPU leader Joshua Nkomo in 1999. That group, known as ZAPU 2000, has not enjoyed much political support.¹⁸ A secessionist Ndebele movement, the Mthwakazi Liberation Front (MLF), was launched in Bulawayo in December 2010 by the former ZIPRA commander, Fidelis Ncube.¹⁹ It remains to be seen how much popular support it will attract during proposed elections in 2011. For now it appears that the majority of Ndebele continue to invest their political, economic and social hopes in the MDC.

⁹ Minority Rights Group International 2011, *State of the World’s Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2011 – Events of 2010*, July, p.91

¹⁰ Freedom House 2010, *Countries at the Crossroads – Zimbabwe*, UNHCR Refworld website, 7 April, p.9 <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4be3c8e70.html> – Accessed 9 February 2011

¹¹ Freedom House 2010, *Freedom in the World – Zimbabwe (2010)*, Freedom House website, June <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2010&country=7952> – Accessed 10 September 2010

¹² Minority Rights Group International 2005, ‘Zimbabwe: Ndebele’, Minority Rights Group International website <http://www.minorityrights.org/4500/zimbabwe/ndebele.html#> – Accessed 24 September 2010

¹³ Central Intelligence Agency 2011, *The World Factbook – Zimbabwe*, CIA website, 23 August <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/zi.html> – Accessed 23 September 2011

¹⁴ UK Home Office 2010, *Country of Origin Information Report – Zimbabwe*, 30 September, pp.11-12

¹⁵ Ploch, L. 2010, *Zimbabwe: Background*, Congressional Research Service, 8 July, pp.7-8

¹⁶ Minority Rights Group International 2005, ‘Zimbabwe: Ndebele’, Minority Rights Group International website <http://www.minorityrights.org/4500/zimbabwe/ndebele.html#> – Accessed 24 September 2010

¹⁷ Ncube, N. 2010, ‘Zimbabwe: Move Over MDCs, Here Cometh ZAPU’, *All Africa Global Media*, source: *Financial Gazette*, 3 September <http://allafrica.com/stories/201009100218.html> – Accessed 16 September 2010

¹⁸ Muzondidya, J. & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. 2009, ‘Echoing Silences’: Ethnicity in post-colonial Zimbabwe, 1980-2007’, 4 May, p.287

¹⁹ Sande, E. 2011, ‘Zimbabwe: MLF, a Force to Reckon With’, News From Africa website, 14 January http://www.newsfromafrica.org/newsfromafrica/articles/art_12228.html – Accessed 17 January 2011

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