

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: ZWE35198
Country: Zimbabwe
Date: 7 August 2009

Keywords: Zimbabwe – ZWE35198 – Human rights subgroup of the MDC

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Questions

1. Deleted.
2. Deleted.
3. Please provide information on the Human Rights Association of the MDC, including its structure and its activities.
4. Are there any reports of members of the Human Rights Association of the MDC being targeted for harm?

RESPONSE

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3. Please provide information on the Human Rights Association of the MDC, including its structure and its activities.
4. Are there any reports of members of the Human Rights Association of the MDC being targeted for harm?

A search of the sources consulted found no mention of a Human Rights Association or similarly named association, group or committee within the Movement for Democratic Change.

The website of the MDC includes information on the organs within the party's structure, but makes no reference to a Human Rights Association or other human rights committee or sub-group within the MDC ('Our Party Structure' (undated), MDC website

http://www.mdc.co.zw/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=29 – Accessed 3 August 2009 – Attachment 13).

Information on the website of the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum lists its 16 member organizations – which include the prominent Zimbabwe Human Rights Association and the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights – none of which appears to be an organ of the MDC (‘Members of the Human Rights Forum’ (undated), Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum website http://www.hrforumzim.com/frames/inside_frame_member.htm – Accessed 3 August 2009 – Attachment 14).

More generally, but of possible interest in this case, a Human Rights Watch report published in November 2008 notes information from the Law Society of Zimbabwe indicating that “police are frequently uncooperative and hostile to lawyers, and many have long since ceased to respect the country’s legal profession”:

Attacks, Harassment and Abuse of Lawyers Taking up Political Cases

According to the president of the Law Society of Zimbabwe, most lawyers were now unwilling to take on so-called political cases for fear of the personal hazards associated with confronting the government in representing MDC and civil society activists.

A small number of lawyers do buck this trend. But they have adopted a strategy of not visiting police stations alone, taking at least two colleagues who can alert other lawyers who can trace them following their arrest and detention. Lawyers report that such harassment is mainly at the hands of police in the Law and Order unit of the Criminal Investigations Division, which has frequently been accused of abusing the rights of detainees and their lawyers in political cases. Previously, the African Commission had criticized the same Law and Order Section for serious human rights abuses.

According to the Law Society of Zimbabwe, police are frequently uncooperative and hostile to lawyers, and many have long since ceased to respect the country’s legal profession. In May 2007 police arrested lawyers Andrew Makoni and Alec Muchadehama on spurious charges of “attempting to defeat course of justice through a falsehood during the course of a bail application.” The two often represent the MDC and others in political cases (Human Rights Watch 2008, “*Our Hands Are Tied*” – *Erosion of the Rule of Law in Zimbabwe*, November, pp. 35-36 – Attachment 15).

List of Attachments

Government Information & Reports

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/>

UK Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

US Department of State <http://www.state.gov/>

Non-Government Organisations

Amnesty International <http://www.amnesty.org/>

Freedom House <http://www.freedomhouse.org/>

Human Rights Watch <http://www.hrw.org/>

NGO Network Alliance Project <http://www.kubatana.net/>

International News & Politics

AllAfrica Global Media <http://allafrica.com/>

BBC News <http://news.bbc.co.uk/>

IRIN News <http://www.irinnews.org/>

The Zimbabwe Times <http://www.thezimbabwetimes.com/>

ZimOnline <http://www.zimonline.co.za/>

Topic Specific

Southern African Legal Information Institute website <http://www.saflii.org/>

Search Engines

Google <http://www.google.com.au/>

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIAC Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Research & Information database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

MRT-RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. Deleted.
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3. Deleted.
4. Deleted.
5. Deleted.
6. Deleted.
7. Deleted.
8. Deleted.
9. Deleted.
10. Deleted.
11. Deleted.
12. Deleted.
13. 'Our Party Structure' (undated), MDC website http://www.mdc.co.zw/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=29 – Accessed 3 August 2009.
14. 'Members of the Human Rights Forum' (undated), Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum website http://www.hrforumzim.com/frames/inside_frame_member.htm – Accessed 3 August 2009.
15. Human Rights Watch 2008, "*Our Hands Are Tied*" – *Erosion of the Rule of Law in Zimbabwe*, November.