

Chiadzwa State Brutalities: Let the women speak

Battered and bruised, raped, HIV infections, STIs, miscarriages, scars of dog bites, Mossberg bullets and unending nightmares are the imprints of the government sanctioned “operation hakudzokwi” (You will not return) which was launched in Chiadzwa diamond fields in November 2008. It is a few weeks before the nation commemorates the massacre of hundreds of civilians by the Zimbabwe National Army in November 2008 under an operation named ‘Operation Hakudzokwi’. Listening to the victims narrate their nightmares is as terrible as listening to survivors of the holocaust. Seeing the scars and swollen flesh due to Mossberg bullets still etched in the victim’s bodies is equally horrendous and perplexing. Only a tip of an iceberg is publicly known of Operation Hakudzokwi.

In an effort to investigate the effects of Operation hakudzokwi on women, the CRD interviewed 20 victims who live in Mutare’s high density suburb of Sakubva. The women, all of them traders who were involved in selling various wares to the panners and buyers in the diamond fields, gave chilling but similar accounts of gross human rights abuses they suffered at the hands of state security agents. Of the 20 women 12 confessed to having been raped either by soldiers or were forced by soldiers to have unprotected sex with panners at gunpoint. From that group the oldest woman who was raped is aged 41. All of them were first beaten severely with iron bars and gun butts to disorient them and break any resistance. After the beatings the women easily complied with any orders given by the soldiers. Two of the victims went for HIV tests after being raped and they tested positive. Some didn’t go for HIV tests after being raped



A woman bludgeoned with an iron bar and raped by a soldier. Picture by CRD

Two of the victims suffered miscarriages due to severe beatings they went through before being gang raped. One of the two women who suffered miscarriage failed to seek treatment after her ordeal and she relied on traditional herbs which left her with severe side effects. She told the CRD her womb was infected and she can’t conceive anymore, causing marital problems for her. The oldest victim, aged 74, was beaten with a gun butt by a soldier young enough to be her grand son. She said she begged the young man not to continue beating her, reminding him he was her ‘son’, to which he retorted, ‘I don’t have a mother who come to Chiadzwa’. Agnes has a swollen womb where she was beaten and she hasn’t been able to seek treatment.

Another elderly woman said she went to Chiadzwa to sell vegetables and she fell into the hands of Police Officers. The officers set two dogs on her and watched as the dogs mauled her. She said she begged the officers to save her life but they continued to instruct the dogs to ‘catch both hands’. She also said she reminded the boys that she was a mother to them to which they replied, ‘we don’t have a mother who come to Chiadzwa’.



Scars from dog bites. Picture by CRD

Mary, not her real name, says she was forced to take off her clothes alongside her four colleagues and they were forced to lie down, putting their heads on a log. The soldiers then hit their heads and beat them all over their bodies. Her friend lost consciousness and when she regained consciousness she had become mentally disturbed. She hasn't recovered since then. A rape victim said she and others were forced to remove their clothes after which the soldiers separated them and ordered the other group to have sex with panners whilst the other group was raped by soldiers. In all cases no protection was applied.



A woman shows scars of wounds inflicted on her by vicious police dogs in Chiadzwa in November 2008

The use of sex as a form of punishment was systematic, meaning it was an acceptable method of punishment approved by the top leadership in the army. Also given the fact that women were gang raped at torture bases where senior army officials were present means that the soldiers were acting on orders. The CRD observed that at the launch of Operation Hakudzokwi Commander General of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces Constantine Chiwenga and Commander of the Air Force of Zimbabwe, Air Marshal Perence Shiri were physically present in Mutare and were flown to the diamonds fields daily for a period exceeding two weeks. The two were based in Mutare for the greater part of November which arguably was the time when most of the gruesome atrocities were committed.

No Remorse

Almost a year after the mass murder of civilians by Zimbabwe's security agents, soldiers continue with the cold blooded murders of individuals seen panning or wandering through the vast diamond fields. The government has vehemently denied that soldiers are committing crimes against humanity in Chiadzwa, indicating that the atrocities have the blessings of the government. Many families around the country are still not informed that their loved ones were killed and in some cases buried by state security agents. The government, through the Minister of Mines, Obert Mpofu, and his deputy Zvizvai Murisi, has conspired to vehemently deny that

soldiers have killed more than 600 people in Chiadzwa since November 2008. The government has also not cooperated with a Kimberly recommendation that an independent commission of inquiry be set up to investigate allegations of gross human rights abuses by state security agents in Chiadzwa.

Consequently victims have maintained their silence, fearing a backlash should they reveal what they went through at the hands of state security agents.