

A report on organised violence and torture in Zimbabwe from 20 to 24 March 2003
Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition
March 28, 2003

The cases discussed in this document occurred after a successful two day stay-away on 18 and 19 March. This report highlights just a few of the hundreds of cases of victimisation by state agents against individuals who were believed to have organised the stay away.

Zimbabwe has been governed by Zanu PF since independence in 1980. In February 2000, Zanu PF was dealt its first ever defeat after two decades of consolidating power and entrenching its stronghold over Zimbabwe. The government's draft Constitution was rejected by the Zimbabwean people in a referendum, after a concerted campaign by Zimbabwean civil society actors including the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA).

Reeling from this defeat, the ruling party launched its violent and chaotic land reform programme, and instigated an organised and carefully planned system of violence directed against perceived dissidents.

This has been characterised by repressive legislation, partisan and brutal policing, politicisation of state security forces including the army, the police and the CIO, the development of non-legislated militia forces, partisan food distribution, harassment of activists, closure of democratic space, intolerance of the independent press and consistent and repeated violations of human rights.

In the past three years, attempts by concerned citizens and civil society organisations to speak out against victimisation and oppression by the regime have been met with resistance and further brutality. The state has developed tactics to suppress dissent, and uses violence and intimidation as its preferred tool to repress pro-democracy voices.

The level of state repression in Zimbabwe has had a tendency to rise and fall with events. For example, the beginning of 2003 witnessed a decrease in organized violence and torture, whereby the majority of the violence perpetrated was by the police on detainees. However at the end of March 2003, a massive upsurge occurred. It is not coincidental that such a rash of violence would begin after the Commonwealth had agreed to postpone any decision on Zimbabwe's suspension until November this year. Perhaps the government believed this gave them another seven months to act with impunity before its human rights record would come under any scrutiny.

However, the most recent wave of violence started after a largely peaceful two day stay-away, organized by the legally elected official opposition party in Zimbabwe, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Individuals believed to be active in the opposition, or whom were suspected of having mobilised support for the stay-away were specifically targeted. A vitriolic speech by Robert Mugabe, on 21 March 2003, given at the graveside of the deceased minister Swithun Mombeshora, further demonstrates that the violence after the stay-away is not accidental. In this speech, Mugabe warned the MDC that, in resisting government through mass action, they were playing with fire, and that "those who play with fire will be consumed by that fire."

In short, the most recent wave of violence, like other acts of political violence in Zimbabwe, are part of an organised, coordinated and targeted campaign meant to terrorise and intimidate any voices of dissent into silence by brutally retaliating against perceived dissidents.

More than 250 people, an unprecedented number, were seen at the emergency departments of a number of hospitals in the capital city, Harare, over a period of four days. This is far greater than any number previously recorded over a similar period of time, even during an election. This is despite the fact that over the past three years, elections in Zimbabwe have been directly linked with a pattern of increased violence. All victims examined by medical personnel during this week's attacks had physical injuries consistent with the weapons used in past cases of torture.

Typical Characteristics

The following summary indicates some of the key characteristics of the attacks of the past four days.

Type of injury

Injuries included bruises, welts, soft tissue injuries, cuts, broken limbs, burns, electrocution and internal bruising. More than thirty of these casualties required admission to hospital for stabilization and orthopaedic and surgical intervention, and the degree of injury was far more severe than previously seen.

Perpetrators

The majority of the perpetrators were dressed in Zimbabwe National Army uniform, and were conveyed in military vehicles to the homes of the victims. Some perpetrators were in police uniforms. Victims taken by the police for questioning were handed over to Zanu PF youth for further assault. In most cases, the attackers worked in groups of between twenty and fifty, assaulting individuals or small families.

Types of Weapons

The perpetrators used fists and booted feet to beat their victims. They also used blunt instruments including batons, sticks, and AK rifle butts. The perpetrators were also equipped with sjamboks (whips), chains and hosepipes.

In addition, many victims reported the use of torture tactics, including electrocution. Other traumas included burning with cigarettes and acid, inserting foreign objects into women's genital areas, urinating in the victim's mouth, and forcing the victims to drink substances such as urine.

Psychological torment was also used, as victims were often threatened with a slow and painful death, and warned not to seek medical treatment or to report the incident.

Victims

In nearly every case, individuals were targeted based on their perceived involvement with the opposition and were accused of organising the recent stay away. Victims included active members and senior officials of the MDC, (including district and provincial leaders, councillors and Members of Parliament), their family members including their children and their neighbours and associates. Both men and women were targeted in these attacks.

The process

Victims were targeted, normally at their home in the early hours (e.g. between 1-3am). The personnel involved in the torture had the names and addresses of the victims, and in many cases, if the victims were not accessible, the other occupants of the house were assaulted. Neighbours were also assaulted physically, and in some cases sexually. In many cases, the victims' political material was taken away, their homes were looted and possessions were stolen.

In most cases, the victims were attacked at their homes and abducted, normally blindfolded. They were taken to a torture cell and further assaulted, being held for up to 48 hours. They were tortured and interrogated over their involvement with the opposition, the activities of the opposition, plans for future actions, and their assessment of the stay-away. Most victims were then abandoned in the bush near a residential area.

Many of the victims are unable to return to their homes, and have continued to receive threatening phone calls. Many were threatened with further assault, if they reported their injuries. In several cases, victims who had received life saving treatment at a hospital and were discharged were assaulted again, requiring readmission for other injuries.

Gender based violence

In several cases, women were deliberately targeted for attack. In others, women relatives and neighbours of the intended victim were also attacked when the perpetrators came. Specific

assaults against women included beating with booted feet and blunt objects, slapping with fists, and sexual assault including inserting foreign objects into a woman's vagina.

Previous reports published by the Human Rights NGO Forum have listed the perpetrators of political violence, and indicated their organisational affiliation¹. The attacks this week constitute the first time in three years that the military (or individuals in military uniforms) have constituted the highest percentage of perpetrators. In addition, this is the first time that the majority of the victims have not been able to name the perpetrators. This indicates a new trend, of using perpetrators who are not known by the victims, and who are not from the same area as their victims. This trend may indicate concern by the state that impunity may not be everlasting in Zimbabwe.

The violence recorded this week was more organised than we have seen in the past, and it was carried out by uniformed agents of the state. The methods of torture and interrogation were systematic. These attacks are indicative of a systemic trend of brutal retaliation against dissent. The lives of many Zimbabwe citizens are at serious risk if this level of state organised violence and torture is maintained or increased. The threat that this poses to the freedom and security of Zimbabwe, and consequently the region, cannot be ignored.

Affidavits and medical reports of three representative incidents are included as Appendices 1-3 of this report.

Photographic evidence of the injuries received is available. Due to the size of these photographs, they can be sent to interested parties on request.

Appendix 1

Testimony:

The statement of ES, a 45 year old Harare resident was recorded on Sunday 23 March, 2003. In it he states:

They came to my home at 1:00 am on Friday 21st March, 2003 – 2 Army Officers in uniform and 6 men in civilian clothing. They beat me, my cousin NS who is 27 years, my sons aged 14 and 11 years. They wanted to know where my wife was and asked why I allowed her to be a member of the MDC, even though I used to work for Government. (I retired from the Army in 2000.) My wife is a councillor for Harare, and she managed to escape over the residence's boundary wall.

The army officers then handcuffed me and started beating me with chains all over my body. They covered my face with cloths and carried on beating me. They tied my feet with rope, blindfolded me and took me in a vehicle to a room in the bush near the airport.

They were saying:-

You are going to die today
You will never see your children again
Where are you training people?
What are MDC's plans?
What is going to happen in the near future?
Why did you go out to that farm with the white people – those Americans?
What is your position in the MDC?

I was kept blindfolded and beaten with batons and sjamboks (whips). Wire was tied to my genitals, small toes and fingers and I was electrocuted.

¹ See, for example, **Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum** (2001), *Who was responsible? A consolidated analysis of pre-election violence in Zimbabwe*, HARARE: ZIMBABWE HUMAN RIGHTS NGO FORUM, and **Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum** (2002), *Are They Accountable?: Examining alleged violators and their violations pre and post the Presidential Election March 2002*, HARARE: ZIMBABWE HUMAN RIGHTS NGO FORUM.

They kept asking what strategies were used in the mass action and who the organisers were. Following this questioning some of them urinated in my mouth.

I was released on Saturday during the afternoon – they threw me into the bush near Msasa suburb, approximately 12ks from the Harare CBD.

Statement recorded on Sunday 23rd March, 2003.

Medical Report

The medical report in this matter indicated that :

“The patient has extensive deep bruises of his back, buttocks and legs with many open wounds consistent with his story of blunt trauma with batons and whips.

He is presently admitted in Hospital under the care of a specialist surgeon.”

Analysis:

ES faced an early morning raid, attack in his own home, victimization of his family, including his children, beating, looting of his home, abduction, blindfolding, electrocution and drinking urine. In this case, the attacks on ES and his family represent a violation of their personal security and of their political rights and freedom of assembly.

Appendix 2

Testimony:

32 year old MK states:-

I reside in Mabvuku high density suburb, and am the MDC Secretary for Harare.

At approximately 1am on Sunday 23rd March, 2003 twenty men (16 in **army uniform** and 4 in civilian clothing) climbed over the boundary wall surrounding our home. When my father answered the knocking on the door the men burst in shouting that they wanted his wife. They called her out and attacked her.

She was wrapped in a cloth, and they did not wait for her to dress before they started to beat her with hose pipes and the butts of their AK 47 assault rifles. Her cloth fell off leaving her naked and they continued to beat her. They locked my father and the younger children in a bedroom. I heard my mother screaming – they made her open her legs and they tried to push the barrel of an AK into her vagina.

When I came out of my room they started beating me. They cut the wire cord off my iron and used that and hose pipes to beat me. They took the poster of Mr. Morgan Tsvangirai off my wall and all the party materials, including T – shirts, leaflets, constitution, documentation and party cards from my room.

They took me outside to their vehicle and wanted to know who my colleagues were and where they lived – I did not tell them, but they already knew. They had a list of all the MDC activists. I was then escorted to a colleagues house MRS. C who lives nearby. They kept taking turns to beat me with the hose pipe. In the meantime they had taken my mother to the house where my brother CK was in hiding (they knew exactly where he was). MRS. C and I were taken back to my house where she was beaten but later released. My mother had managed to escape while they were beating my brother.

They then took me and C away in the army truck. One of the soldiers was burning my hand with his cigarette and pulling the skin off the back of my hand with his finger nails. We were driven to the other side of Mabvuku – Chizhanje. En route the soldiers were beating us alternately. We were taken to MRS. G 's home (vice Chairman of MDC Mabvuku). The soldiers jumped over her wall and proceeded to beat her husband AG. When he passed out, they left him and brought his wife to the vehicle. We were driven around Chizhanje while they beat us on our backs, then we were dropped off about 500 meters from Mrs. G's home at

about 3am. I was unable to walk as the soldiers had stamped on my knees with their boots, so Mrs. G dragged me to her house. They drove off with my brother C.

The soldiers stole \$10,000.00 from our home. I had to borrow \$3000.00 to get my mother and myself to hospital.

My mother and I were treated in hospital, where we later found C. It is clear that my mother was severely traumatised by the attack. She has said that she wants to commit suicide.

Medical Reports – K family.

The medical reports for this case highlight the following:

- Patient M. K has extensive deep bruising and laceration on her back and legs and deep bruising of both buttocks. Both forearms are swollen and tender and she has minor linear lacerations on her face. Her injuries are consistent with her testimony of being beaten with hosepipes and rifle butts.
- Patient C. K has acid burns on his back and extensive deep bruising and lacerations of his back and buttocks and legs. He also has severe chest wall and abdominal tenderness consistent with his story of assault with boots and blunt instruments. He is admitted in hospital.
- Patient Mrs. K has a large bruise of her right eye and tender swellings on her head. She has multiple deep bruises of her back, buttocks and legs and a bruise in her vagina consistent with her story of assault with a rifle barrel in her vagina. She is at present admitted in hospital. She shows signs of acute anxiety.
- Patient AG has a fractured scapula and ribs and extensive deep bruising of his back, buttocks and legs, consistent with his history of severe sustained blunt trauma.

Analysis:

In this incident, the violence against the victims was broad. MK and his family suffered brutal assaults including beatings and sexual assaults. His home was looted and material was sabotaged. He and his family were beaten, kicked, abducted and abandoned.

These attacks represent a violation of the family's constitutionally guaranteed political freedom. In addition, a woman was targeted for sexual assault, including violation of her genitals with a rifle butt. In this manner the attackers compromised the integrity of her body. This woman is now suffering severe psychological trauma as a result.

Appendix 3

Testimony:

RM is a 46 year old man who states:

I am the MDC Chairperson for X. At 1am on Wednesday 19th March, 2003 I was at my home in Chitungwiza when 6 men, 2 in **ZR Police uniform** and 1 in **army combat uniform** arrived. They were all armed with hand guns. They took my T shirts, Rural Council fliers and my children's birth certificates. I was dragged out to a white and blue Nissan Sunny car. My head was covered with a hood and they assaulted me with their hand guns and elbows while we were in the car. Whilst we were driving they kept punching me in the face with fists.

They said they were taking me to "wafa wafa" (which means "die, die") and wanted to know if I was the one who burned a bus and been paid \$120,000.00 by Mr. Tsvangirai to do so. They said "you will never go back, we are going to kill you". They kept hitting me with sticks. I was leg ironed and handcuffed. The handcuffs were so tight I pleaded for them to be loosened. They refused saying "we are killing you bit by bit, don't worry about the pain". I asked them to rather shoot me one time. They said "no we will kill you bit by bit so you feel the pain". I was taken to a room in a barrack (it looked like a soldiers barracks) and told I could lie down. The hood was on my head but I managed to peep to see where I was.

The next morning they asked me where I was trained to be a liberation fighter. They said I was with Edgar Tekere in ZUM and that they would not hit me in the day time but only at night when they were drunk.

They took my wallet with my CABS card (forced me to give them the secret number), \$2000.00 in cash, ZIMRIGHT card, ICRIC card, and my diary. They wanted to know about JG, BG, IK(all farmers) and why I had their names and numbers in my diary and when I had meetings with these people. They asked about my meetings with these people. They asked about my meetings with JAG (Justice for Agriculture) – I told them that I had never had a meeting with JAG.

They also wanted to know if I had joined the War Liberators Platform and took a photocopy of my War Veterans card (the original was “confiscated” by CIO at the time of the war vets pay out because I had joined ZUM).

At 5 pm that evening wires were attached to my toes, ears and genitals and every time they asked me a question they would shout “on” and switch on the electricity. I was blindfolded. They were also hitting me with sticks.

After what seemed hours they took me out of the building and started beating me again. They then took off the handcuffs and leg irons, put me into a vehicle saying that they were taking me to Chinhoyi. I was dumped in the bush, the blindfold was removed and they sprayed tear gas into my eyes. I managed to find my way to safety and arrived at my home at 7.30 am.

Medical Report

The medical report in this incident shows that the patient was extremely unwell on admission and required admission to a high care unit due to his prolonged torture by electrocution. He had multiple deep bruises and lacerations on his back and legs, consistent with his history of blunt trauma.

The photographs available in support of this report give evidence of the soft tissue injuries sustained by the victim during the torture.

Analysis:

In this case, the victim was robbed, assaulted, blindfolded, handcuffed, threatened, abducted, electrocuted, and abandoned.

The interrogation and threats suffered by RM during these attacks constitute a violation of his freedom of assembly and his right to political freedom. There is also a breach of his right to protection of property. In addition, there is a violation of his children's right to citizenship and identity, as their birth certificates were confiscated.