8 International Organizations Condemn Human Rights Violations in Zimbabwe

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Several human rights organizations say Zimbabwe should respect and protect the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, participation in political and governmental affairs, and personal integrity.

In a joint statement to mark Human Rights Day on Saturday, Amnesty International USA (AIUSA), Freedom House, Friends of Angola Front Line Defenders, International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), Solidarity Center, Trade Union Congress of Swaziland and Vanguard Africa Movement, said they are concerned about what is currently happening in the Southern African nation.

“As the world celebrates Human Rights Day, Zimbabwe continues to disregard the basic rights of its citizens.”

The organizations said they strongly condemn the government’s failure to respect and protect its citizens’ right to peacefully assemble, to express their opinions and to make peaceful demands on their government.

“It is deeply concerning that in the last few months an increasing number of citizens have been arrested and are facing prosecution for participating in peaceful protests. Even more concerning are the numbers of human rights defenders, workers and worker organizations, and protestors who have been threatened, abducted, arbitrarily detained, and tortured in apparent retaliation for exercising their constitutional rights.”

They said the right to freedom of assembly is a fundamental human right. “It is the vehicle that enables citizens to collectively express, promote, pursue, and defend their common interests. Indeed, Section 58 of Zimbabwe’s constitution specifically guarantees the right to peaceful assembly.

“Section 67 guarantees every citizen the right to political participation; particularly the right to individually or collectively, in gatherings or groups or in any other manner engage in peaceful activities to influence, challenge or support the policies of the government.”

The organizations said Zimbabwe also committed itself to protecting these rights as a signatory to the African Charter of Human and People's Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

They noted that recent incidents include the arrests of Thobekile Ncube, Mudiwa Mahere, Talent Chademana, Pastor Patrick Mugadza, Fadzayi Mahere, Henry Munangatire, and Nyasha Musandu, detained on November 18, 2016, while peacefully sitting in protest in Africa Unity Square in central Harare.

Several other protesters including pro-democracy and good governance defenders, Promise Mkwananzi, Mehluli Dube and Kudakwashe Manjonjo, recently appeared in court “facing various spurious charges under the Criminal Code and the Public Order and Security Act for exercising their right to assemble.

“In the last three months, several activists have been abducted, including National Vendors Union of Zimbabwe, Harare chairman Kudakwashe Kambakunje, reportedly tortured by suspected state agents in September. Human rights defender Paston Dzamara was forcibly taken and tortured in November on the eve of a planned protest against the introduction of ‘bond-notes’.

The organizations further noted that most recently, Ishmael Kauzani, a member of social movement Tajamuka-Sesijikile Campaign, was also abducted, assaulted and run over by suspected state agents.

“Abductions and torture are among the most heinous of human rights violations. These citizens are believed to have been targeted for their role in organizing various anti-government protests on corruption, unemployment and economic policies.

“The government of Zimbabwe has a duty to refrain and protect its citizens from such acts, regardless of their political opinions. The situation in Zimbabwe indicates an intolerance of different political views, inconsistent with the founding principles and values enumerated in Zimbabwe’s Constitution.”

According to the eight organizations, enshrined in that document is respect for human rights and freedoms, the rule of law, and the recognition of the inherent dignity and worth of each human being.

“We therefore call upon the government of Zimbabwe to immediately drop all charges against human rights defenders and citizens arrested for peacefully exercising their right to assemble; Ensure that those who undertake to raise their concerns through peaceful assembly are not arbitrarily arrested, detained and/or prosecuted; Ensure the protection from abduction and torture of all peoples in Zimbabwe, and ensure that those responsible for such heinous acts are promptly and thoroughly investigated and held accountable for their conduct.”

They said they would continue to monitor the situation in Zimbabwe to help ensure that all arms of the government respect the rights of all peoples in Zimbabwe, as provided for in its Constitution and its international legal obligations.