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Zimbabwe: No Justice for Rampant Killings, Torture

Impunity Fuels New Abuses, Imperils Future Elections



A 29-year-old Zimbabwean refugee lives with her baby in dire poverty in Johannesburg, South Africa. At Zimbabwe, ZANU-PF militia killed her brother and burned down her house because of her support for Democratic Change [MDC]. She said that the assailants brutally beat her, despite her being heavily pregnant. © 2009 Getty Images

(Johannesburg) - The failure of Zimbabwe's government to investigate and prosecute killings, torture, and politically motivated violence since the 2008 elections is fueling further human

rights violations, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today.

The 40-page report, "[Perpetual Fear: Impunity and Cycles of Violence in Zimbabwe](#)," examines the lack of justice in several illustrative cases of political killings, torture, and abductions by government security forces and their allies during and after the presidential election run-off in 2008. Human Rights Watch called on Zimbabwe's power-sharing government to conduct immediate, credible, impartial, and transparent investigations into serious human rights abuses and to discipline or prosecute those responsible, regardless of their position or rank.

"The power-sharing government's pledge after the 2008 elections for human rights reforms has been all talk and no action," said Daniel Bekele, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "The government's failure to punish the attackers only emboldens those intent on committing political violence and torture."

In late February 2011, Harare police raided a gathering of people watching a video about recent demonstrations in North Africa. The police arrested everyone in the room, and some people were allegedly beaten on the soles of their feet. The incident is part of a broader pattern of political violence against perceived opponents of President Robert Mugabe and the Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), the former sole ruling party, with elections anticipated in the coming year, Human Rights Watch said.

Human Rights Watch previously documented cases of violence during the 2008 elections, showing that the ZANU-PF-led government was responsible, at the highest levels, for widespread and systematic abuses that led to the killing of up to 200 people, the beating and torture of 5,000 more, and the displacement of about 36,000 people.

There has been little or no accountability for these crimes, Human Rights Watch said. Complaints of political violence filed by victims or their relatives have largely been ignored by the police or have stalled in the courts. The government has failed to respond to calls by local nongovernmental organizations to investigate abuses.

Human Rights Watch expressed concern that many of those who committed serious crimes during the 2008 elections continue to live in the same communities, sometimes next door to their victims, raising concerns about the possibility of future violence. Local human rights groups have reported several cases in which security agents and ZANU-PF supporters who tortured and beat people during the 2008 election run-off have threatened victims with further violence ahead of a proposed constitutional referendum and new elections.

Zimbabwe's power-sharing government has also failed to hold to account security agents who in November and December 2008 abducted and tortured over 40 human rights activists and officials from the Movement for Democratic Change, the former opposition party that is now nominally part of the power-sharing government. There have been no arrests in the case, despite

court rulings that acts of torture were committed and the identification by the activists of some of the state agents responsible.

There also has been little progress in setting up effective transitional justice mechanisms to deal with past human rights abuses. The Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation, and Integration, which was established in the aftermath of the creation of the government of national unity, has not included any provisions for justice and accountability. Constitutional provisions that allow Mugabe to grant pardons, amnesty, or clemency to those implicated in or convicted of serious human rights violations have not been amended, as envisioned in the post-election roadmap.

Human Rights Watch called on the power-sharing government to take all necessary measures to end impunity by setting up an independent commission of inquiry, with credible civil society panel members, to investigate serious past human rights violations, including those committed during the 2008 election period.

"Zimbabwe will not be able to hold free, fair, and credible elections until it restores the rule of law and ends impunity for serious human rights abuses," Bekele said. "The government needs to end political violence and show that it can deliver justice."

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