



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe – ZWE37005 – MDC –
Women’s Groups – Women – Highfield –
Returnees – Students – CIO
16 July 2010

1. What are the activities of the MDC Women’s Association?

There was no information found on a group called the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Women’s Association. There are, however, women’s organisations within the MDC. During the founding of the MDC, it was reported that several women’s organisations had been involved. These united to form the Constitutional Women’s Coalition, which later became the Women’s Coalition”.¹ Other women’s organisations associated with the MDC are the Women’s Assembly and Women’s League.² It was asserted in a January 2010 article that “women make up the greater number of supporters” in the MDC.³

Another organisation, not explicitly linked with the MDC but in opposition to the Mugabe regime, is Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA). WOZA is described as an activist organisation that has “led some of the most important protests in recent years, linking issues of violence against women to wider themes of economic and social collapse from which women suffered disproportionately”.¹ According to the UK based SW Radio Africa, WOZA had led peaceful protests of hundreds of people in Harare and Bulawayo in February 2010 which aimed to promote democracy and criticise delays in drafting the constitution.⁴ However, the US Department of State (DOS) reported that police violently disrupted the marches and used batons to injure several women.⁵ Further protests were reported in Bulawayo in September 2009 to coincide with the United Nations International Day of Peace.⁶ The US DOS also reported on a June 2009 protest by approximately 700 WOZA members to commemorate International Day of Refugees.⁵

2. Have the Association’s members been targeted by ZANU-PF members/supporters?

Women’s Groups

While no information was found on the MDC Women’s Association being targeted by ZANU-PF members or supporters, there are reports of members of women’s organisations opposed to the regime being targeted. It was reported in June 2008 that the chairperson of the MDC Women’s League had “been living in hiding for over a month now” for fear of attacks

¹ Zeilig, L. 2010, ‘Zimbabwe: Struggle, dictatorship and the response of the social movements’, *Links*, 28 June <http://links.org.au/node/1768> – Accessed 14 July 2010 – Attachment 1

² Ncube, N. 2010, ‘Zimbabwe: Change Sweeps Through MDC-T’, *Financial Gazette*, 24 June <http://allafrica.com/stories/201007060728.html> – Accessed 14 July 2010 – Attachment 2

³ Mapuranga, D. 2010, ‘Zimbabwe: Power-Hungry Individuals Will Be MDC-T’s Downfall’, *The Herald*, 28 January <http://allafrica.com/stories/201001280033.html> – Accessed 14 July 2010 – Attachment 3

⁴ ‘Woza ‘Valentine’ protests attracts hundreds’ 2010, *SW Radio Africa*, 16 February – Attachment 4

⁵ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Zimbabwe*, March, Section 1c – Attachment 5

⁶ Gonda, V. 2009, ‘WOZA protestors beaten by police in Bulawayo’, *The Herald*, 22 September – Attachment 6

from ZANU PF militias. Her driver had been recently murdered by suspected ZANU PF militias.⁷ The aforementioned US DOS report on the WOZA protests in February 2010 states that in addition to the beating of protesters, eight women were arrested and three, including one who was pregnant, were beaten while in police custody.⁸ It was reported that police subsequently went door to door in a campaign to sift out activists who had been involved in the protests. A WOZA Coordinator, Jenni Williams, labelled this “pure harassment”.⁹ The September 2009 protesters were also said to have been “brutally assaulted by riot police”.¹⁰ In the June 2009 protests, police used batons to disperse the protesters. It is alleged that one woman who was arrested was beaten and jumped on, and four of the protesters were denied medical treatment for their injuries.⁸ Freedom House added that “hundreds of women” were reportedly arrested during demonstrations throughout 2008.¹¹

Female Opposition Supporters

Outside of those members of specific women’s organisations opposed to the Mugabe regime, women who are associated with the MDC more generally are also targeted. US based international AIDS advocacy group AIDS-Free World published a 2008 report which alleges that female MDC supporters were targeted in a systematic rape campaign led by the ZANU-PF. The report, based on 70 sworn affidavits of survivors and witnesses, alleges that “every victim ... was involved in organizing for or supporting the Movement for Democratic Change”. Some had positions as officers of the party, but most were merely ‘active’ members who volunteered for the party, attended rallies, distributed MDC pamphlets, or wore MDC t-shirts in their communities. Sixty-seven of the women reported that the perpetrators made political statements during the rapes. The report argued that the rapes were part of a campaign “against MDC female members and supporters calculated to intimidate, humiliate, and punish them—and by extension, their families—for their political affiliation”. The attacks were seemingly condoned by authorities with “consistent refusal by police to investigate the attacks, as well as a lack of legal action by NGOs to address the rapes”.¹²

Several other reports found evidence of politically motivated violence against women opposition supporters including rape. A December 2009 UK Home Office report adds that during the 2008 elections, rape was used as a “political weapon against opposition supporters”.¹¹ This view was echoed by Freedom House in its 2009 annual report.¹³ Human rights groups estimated that between May and July 2008, 2000 women had been raped at militia camps. The Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU) NGO conducted a study in May 2009 which told the stories of four women who were tortured for their political activities.¹⁴

⁷ Nsingo, E. 2008, ‘Women Bear Brunt of Violence’, *Inter Press Service*, 28 January <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=43006> – Accessed 14 July 2010 – Attachment 7

⁸ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Zimbabwe*, March, Section 1c – Attachment 5

⁹ ‘Woza activists arrested in Mutare’ 2010, *SW Radio Africa*, 17 February – Attachment 8

¹⁰ Gonda, V. 2009, ‘WOZA protesters beaten by police in Bulawayo’, *The Herald*, 22 September – Attachment 6

¹¹ UK Home Office 2009, *Country of origin information report: Zimbabwe*, 23 December – Attachment 10

¹² AIDS-Free World 2009, *Electing to Rape: Sexual Terror in Mugabe’s Zimbabwe*, AIDS-Free World website, December, pp.13-14, 26-27 <http://www.aids-free-world.org/images/stories/Zimbabwe/zim%20grid%20screenversionfinal.pdf> – Accessed 04 January 2009 – Attachment 9

¹³ Freedom House 2009, ‘Freedom in the World Country Report: Zimbabwe’, 16 July – Attachment 11

¹⁴ ‘Politically Motivated Violence against Zimbabwean Women’ 2009, *The Zimbabwean*, 7 May – Attachment 12

A May 2010 report stated that the scale of the attacks on women MDC supporters had led to the formation of a group called Women of Mbare Arise (WOMA) whose aim is to bring together female activists who have suffered violence. A representative of the group said that they had “buried more than 20 women activists who died from causes related to the injuries they sustained during the violence”.¹⁵

3. Deleted

4. Are family members of MDC activists currently subject to harm by authorities, ZANU-PF supporters?

Family members of MDC activists are likely to be subject to harm by authorities or ZANU-PF supporters. The 2010 US DOS human rights report alleges that ZANU-PF supporters “continued to assault suspected and known MDC members and their families”.¹⁶ The aforementioned AIDS-Free World report mentions that 37 of the 70 victims interviewed had relatives who held official positions in the MDC. Twelve of the women’s husbands served as chairmen or secretaries for their districts or wards and eight women’s fathers were officials in the party. The remainder had nephews, siblings, mothers, and cousins who held positions.¹⁷ Similarly, the aforementioned May 2009 RAU report states not only were the victims in the study tortured for their own political activities but also for the political activities of a family member.¹³ A Human Rights Watch report from May 2007 described the beating of the mother of an opposition supporter by police. The opposition supporter claimed that despite his pleas to not beat her because she was not an activist “they wouldn’t stop. They said she was my mother and therefore deserved to be beaten”.¹⁸

More generally it was reported in 2009 that the family members of opposition supporters had been abducted by groups of armed men believed to be working on behalf of, or with the acquiescence of the Zimbabwean authorities.¹⁹ The Zimbabwe Peace Project NGO alleged that “ZANU PF militia have a tendency of abducting women and children”. This was often due to the fact that most male opposition supporters had fled rural areas and the women and children were taken as ransom to force the husbands and fathers to return.²⁰ This view was echoed in a UK Home Office report from July 2009 adding that women were often forced to reveal where their husbands were hiding.²¹ The Zimbabwe Peace Project also stated that the abducted women were “assaulted, tortured, and sexually harassed”. It cites the case of a woman who was abducted and murdered because her husband was an MDC activist. Furthermore, the leader of a “prominent women's organisation” who declined to be named, claimed most women were being harassed because their husbands, sons or male relatives were suspected to be supporters of the opposition.¹⁹

¹⁵ Sifile, V. 2010, ‘MDC activists suffer and die alone’, *The Standard*, 1 June – Attachment 13

¹⁶ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Zimbabwe*, March, Section 1c – Attachment 5

¹⁷ AIDS-Free World 2009, *Electing to Rape: Sexual Terror in Mugabe’s Zimbabwe*, AIDS-Free World website, December, pp.13-14, 26-27 <http://www.aids-free-world.org/images/stories/Zimbabwe/zim%20grid%20screenversionfinal.pdf> – Accessed 04 January 2009 – Attachment 9

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch 2007, *Bashing Dissent – Escalating Violence and State Repression in Zimbabwe*, May, Volume 19, No. 6(A), pp. 1 & 20-21 – Attachment 14

¹⁹ UK Home Office 2009, *Country of origin information report: Zimbabwe*, 23 December – Attachment 10

²⁰ Nsingo, E. 2008, ‘Women Bear Brunt of Violence’, *Inter Press Service*, 28 January <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=43006> – Accessed 14 July 2010 – Attachment 7

²¹ UK Home Office 2009, ‘Country of Origin Information Report – Zimbabwe’, 20 July, p.102 – Attachment 29

5. Please provide relevant information on rallies held in Highfields and Glenorah in late 2008.

Highfield is a suburb of Harare which is home to the Zimbabwe Grounds sports arena where political rallies are often held. A *Sydney Morning Herald* article referred to a Highfield rally in October 2008 where MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai planned to give his reaction to President Mugabe's unilateral decision to hand key ministries to his own party.²² Glen Norah is a suburb neighbouring Highfield. An MDC rally was reportedly held in Glen Norah in June 2008 prior to the presidential runoff. Zanu PF militia and war veterans had allegedly attempted to disrupt the rally.²³ There were no reports of women's associations having any involvement in either of these rallies.

There were several references to rallies in Highfield outside of the specified period. There was a rally at Zimbabwe Grounds for the MDC's 10th Anniversary celebrations in November 2009. Over 50,000 people were said to have attended.²⁴ Another Highfield rally was held by the supporters of President Robert Mugabe in November 2007. In the days surrounding the rally, it was alleged that Zanu PF youths were beating up any person thought to be an opposition supporter.²⁵ Catholic news website *Cath News* reported on a crackdown by police on an opposition rally/prayer meeting in March 2007 which saw one person killed and several injured. There were 35 people arrested including MDC leader Tsvangirai.²⁶ An article from February 2007 described a crackdown in Highfield to prevent Tsvangirai from launching his presidential campaign there. It was alleged in an Association of Zimbabwe Journalists article that this led to police also moving into the neighbouring suburbs, including Glen Norah, and "beating people up".^{27 28}

6. Are there reports that officers from the Central Intelligence Office harass returned students from overseas? Are returning students suspected/accused of spying for western states?

A DFAT report from 2007 stated that students returning from Western states would only be identified upon return if they had been active in opposition organisations such as the MDC and trade unions:

Officers of the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) have been working under cover for some time as Immigration Officers at Harare International Airport. If an individual student was active in organisations subject to harassment by the GOZ, such as the Movement for Change (MDC), trade unions or civil society organisations, it is possible that she might be identified on arrival at

²² Jongwe, F. 2008, 'Zimbabwe opposition condemns Mugabe', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 October <http://news.smh.com.au/world/zimbabwe-opposition-condemns-mugabe-20081012-4z4e.html> – Accessed 14 July 2010 – Attachment 15

²³ 'Zimbabwe court orders release of opposition MP', Stuff.co website, 9 June <http://www.stuff.co.nz/world/480509> – Accessed 14 July 2010 – Attachment 16

²⁴ Paganga, L. 2009, '50 000 turn up for Highfield rally', New Zim Situation website, 30 November <http://newzimsituation.com/20725yd/50-000-turn-up-for-highfield-rally.htm> – Accessed 14 July 2010 – Attachment 17

²⁵ Makiwa, H. 2007, 'Zanu PF Terrorises Harare During Mugabe's "1 Million-Man March"', *SW Radio Africa*, 30 November <http://allafrica.com/stories/200711301084.html> – Accessed 14 July 2010 – Attachment 18

²⁶ 'Zimbabwe prayer meeting crushed' 2007, *Cath News*, 13 March <http://cathnews.acu.edu.au/703/71.php> – Accessed 14 July 2010 – Attachment 19

²⁷ Baxter, D. 2007, 'Zimbabwe riot police run amok, streets empty as MDC rally is stopped', association of Zimbabwean Journalists website, 18 February http://www.zimbabwejournalists.com/print.php?art_id=1777 – Accessed 14 July 2010 – Attachment 20

²⁸ Commonwealth of Australia 2007, 'Further Political Repression by the Mugabe Regime in Zimbabwe', Minister for Foreign Affairs website, 13 March http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2007/fa029_07.html – Accessed 14 July 2010 – Attachment 21

Harare Airport. If so, any punitive measures taken against her by the GOZ would be the result of such activism, not of simply having studied in Australia.²⁹

Returnees

Information was found to suggest that those returning from overseas were sometimes suspected of spying for Western states. However, there were opposing views as to the extent of this and whether this would result in returnees being targeted.

A *BBC News* article from 2005 cites claims by lawyers for Zimbabwean asylum seekers in Britain that “Zimbabweans deported home are regarded as traitors or spies by Robert Mugabe's government”. They stated that “Authorities believe returning asylum seekers are being deliberately sent back as ‘agents of regime change’”. However, the British Home Office argued that while returnees were subject to “in-depth questioning” by Zimbabwe’s Central Intelligence Organisation, they were not at “real risk of persecution”. The article states that Zimbabwean authorities took a particular interest in those returning from Britain due to the perception that the Blair Government was leading the international campaign for “regime change” in Zimbabwe.³⁰ A June 2008 article claimed that all of Zimbabwe’s policies were geared toward “countering foreign threats including the ‘threats’ from Zimbabweans abroad, who are seen as working against the ruling party”.³¹ Furthermore, the UK Asylum and Immigration Tribunal assessed in a 2005 case that “it was clear that Zimbabwean security services believed returning asylum seekers were British spies”.³² The aforementioned December 2009 UK Home Office report added that anyone who returns to Zimbabwe through Harare airport, as they pass through immigration, has their details fed into a “central system as part of Zimbabwe’s paranoia to detect undesirables, like journalists, or trade unionists”.³³

Some also claimed that, more generally, returning Zimbabweans were thought of as being traitors. DFAT provided advice in February 2008 in relation to an individual from Zimbabwe who had claimed that her neighbours would assume that, because she had travelled overseas and sent her children overseas for education, she must be receiving money from the MDC. DFAT however, assessed that the individual would not be likely to be targeted by her neighbours as described.³⁴ In October 2009, a UK based Zimbabwean asylum seeker charity described the story of a returnee from the UK who was allegedly murdered by ZANU PF youths “for being a ‘sell-out’”.³⁵

Students and the CIO

Relations between students and the CIO more generally were also characterised by allegations of monitoring and targeting by the latter. The US DOS 2010 report stated that CIO personnel at times assumed faculty positions and posed as students at Zimbabwean universities and other public universities to intimidate and gather intelligence on faculty and students who criticise government policies and actions. A May 2010 article reported the alleged abduction

²⁹ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report No. ZWE32420 – Zimbabwe: RRT Information Request: ZWE32420*, 23 October – Attachment 22

³⁰ ‘Zimbabwe returnees regarded spies’ 2005, *BBC News*, 6 October

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4315122.stm – Accessed 7 September 2009 – Attachment 23

³¹ Kundishora, H. 2008, ‘Zimbabwe Must not Persecute its Diaspora’, *The African Executive*, 11-18 June <http://www.africanexecutive.com/modules/magazine/articles.php?article=3211#> - Accessed 30 October 2009 – Attachment 24

³² ‘Q and A: Zimbabwe asylum ruling’ 2006, *BBC News*, 11 April

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4901202.stm - Accessed 4 November 2009 – Attachment 25

³³ UK Home Office 2009, *Country of origin information report: Zimbabwe*, 23 December, p49 – Attachment 10

³⁴ DIAC Country Information Service 2008, *Country Information Report No. 08/05 – Imputed Political Opinion*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 2 February 2008), 5 February – Attachment 26

³⁵ ‘Concern Raised as UK Threatens Deportations’ 2009, *All Africa*, source: SW Radio Africa, 31 October – Attachment 27

and severe assault of two student leaders from the Zimbabwe National Student's Union (ZINASU) by CIO operatives.³⁶

Attachments

1. Zeilig, L. 2010, 'Zimbabwe: Struggle, dictatorship and the response of the social movements', *Links*, 28 June <http://links.org.au/node/1768> – Accessed 14 July 2010.
2. Ncube, N. 2010, 'Zimbabwe: Change Sweeps Through MDC-T', *Financial Gazette*, 24 June <http://allafrica.com/stories/201007060728.html> – Accessed 14 July 2010.
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4. 'Woza 'Valentine' protests attracts hundreds' 2010, *SW Radio Africa*, 16 February. (CISNET – Zimbabwe CX239781)
5. US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Zimbabwe*, March, Section 1c.
6. Gonda, V. 2009, 'WOZA protestors beaten by police in Bulawayo', *The Herald*, 22 September. (CISNET – Zimbabwe CX233927)
7. Nsingo, E. 2008, 'Women Bear Brunt of Violence', *Inter Press Service*, 28 January <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=43006> – Accessed 14 July 2010.
8. 'Woza activists arrested in Mutare' 2010, *SW Radio Africa*, 17 February. (CISNET – Zimbabwe CX239908)
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10. UK Home Office 2009, *Country of origin information report: Zimbabwe*, 23 December.
11. Freedom House 2009, 'Freedom in the World Country Report: Zimbabwe', 16 July. (CISNET – Zimbabwe CX230124)
12. 'Politically Motivated Violence against Zimbabwean Women' 2009, *The Zimbabwean*, 7 May. (CISNET – Zimbabwe CX225889)
13. Sifile, V. 2010, 'MDC activists suffer and die alone', *The Standard*, 1 June. (CISNET – Zimbabwe CX244328)
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³⁶ Bell, A. 2010, 'Student leaders hospitalised after CIO assault', *SW Radio Africa*, 28 May – Attachment 28

15. Jongwe, F. 2008, 'Zimbabwe opposition condemns Mugabe', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 October <http://news.smh.com.au/world/zimbabwe-opposition-condemns-mugabe-20081012-4z4e.html> – Accessed 14 July 2010.
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21. Commonwealth of Australia 2007, 'Further Political Repression by the Mugabe Regime in Zimbabwe', Minister for Foreign Affairs website, 13 March http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2007/fa029_07.html – Accessed 14 July 2010.
22. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report No. ZWE32420 – Zimbabwe: RRT Information Request: ZWE32420*, 23 October.
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28. Bell, A. 2010, 'Student leaders hospitalised after CIO assault', *SW Radio Africa*, 28 May. (CISNET – Zimbabwe CX244416)
29. UK Home Office 2009, 'Country of Origin Information Report – Zimbabwe', 20 July, p.102.