



**Zimbabwe – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 19 April 2017**

**Information in relation to Umhlahlo Wesizwe SikaMthwakazi (UMhlahlo we Sizwe sika Mthwakaz) party. Information in relation to a national Stay-away (strike) last summer & any information in relation to what punishment people charged with taking part in a political party expect in Zimbabwe.**

A Voice of America news report states:

“The Umhlahlo Wesizwe sika Mthwakazi is an organization that advocates for the perseverance of the Ndebele culture and the re-establishment of the kingdom through peaceful means.” (Voice of America – Zimbabwe (26 June 2015) *Zimbabweans Urged to Openly Discuss Matabeleland Secession Proposals*)

A document published on the Ezakomthwakazi website, in a paragraph headed “Introduction of the Organization: U-Mhlahlo we Sizwe sika Mthwakazi”, states:

“U-Mhlahlo is the community based, civic Organization of Mthwakazi which is fighting for the abolition of the 'Rule by Conquest' of the Inter-Cultural Society of Mthwakazi and promotes its diverse cultural identity and the right of people to its symbiotic nationality on the bases of equality and the right to self-determination. U-Mhlahlo was formed on 11 June 2006 at Amakhosi Cultural Village, at Makhokhoba Township, in Bulawayo. It was formed by the Activists from 29 community based civic groups, which consisted of political activists, cultural, religious, workers, students, women, youths, elderly people and some traditional leaders.” (Ezakomthwakazi (8 May 2014) *Organization in brief: uMhlahlo we Sizwe sikaMthwakazi*)

A document published on the People of Mthwakazi website states:

“Therefore, the people-representative groups affiliated to Umhlahlo Wesizwe SikaMthwakazi, a civic group supported by political parties and other civic organizations in the region of Matabeleland and the Midlands (originally a part of Matabeleland), have come together in order to bring to attention to the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights, the gross human rights violations that have been perpetrated against the subjects of Matabeleland and the Midlands by the present regime which has been using the current system of governance as a device for the suppression of the people of this region.” (People of Mthwakazi (Alias Matabeleland) (22 May 2012) *Position Paper of the People of Mthwakazi (Alias Matabeleland) to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Human Rights Violations of the Matabeleland Nation*)

An article from the independent Zimbabwean newspaper NewsDay states:

“Eight small political parties and civic society groups from Matabeleland have formed a united political front, Alliance Khumbul’ Ekhaya (AKE), to collectively mobilise resources for their candidates ahead of harmonised elections expected early next year. The alliance is expected to be officially launched in Bulawayo on Saturday. It comprises the Patriotic Union of Matabeleland (Puma), Mthwakazi National Party (MNP), Matabeleland Liberation Organisation (MLO), Mthwakazi Liberation Front (MLF), UMhlahlo Wesizwe SikaMthwakazi, the Zimbabwe Unemployed People’s Union (Zupa), Isijula Trust and Zapu-FP.” (NewsDay (3 December 2012) *8 parties form united front*)

An article from the now defunct Zimbabwean newspaper Southern Eye states:

“Zimbabwe's various secessionist Mthwakazi political movements and supporting groups recently converged in Botswana to map out strategies to lobby the Zanu PF government to allow for the restoration of Mthwakazi state. The meeting, held last week at Chitawa Lodge, about seven kilometres from the Ramokgwebana Border between Botswana and Zimbabwe, was attended by 60 representatives from political parties and civil society groups, which are advocating for the separation of Matabeleland from the rest of the country. These included Mthwakazi Liberation Front (MLF), Mthwakazi Republic Party (MRP), Umhlahlo weSizwe SikaMthwakazi, Abalobi Bakithi, Abalaphi Bendulo (Traditional Healers Association), and South Africa's chairman of Gauteng chiefs, Chief Ndwandwe, who was the guest of honour. MLF spokesman, David Magagula told Southern Eye yesterday the meeting was a success. ‘The conference was aimed at bringing together, for the first time, leaders of political organisations of Mthwakazi, non-governmental organisations, business personnel and all Mthwakazi agenda followers, to debate the route to our total independence. This was a stepping stone to Mthwakazi liberation,’ he said.” (Southern Eye (20 October 2015) *Mthwakazi political movements meet*)

A report published by the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office refers to the treatment of members of opposition parties in Zimbabwe as follows:

“A number of attacks against opposition party members were reported during this period. These reports included several serious assaults, blamed on ZANU PF youths and police. Several MDC-T rallies were broken up by police and Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF – the ruling party) youth during November. Following this, on 17 November, the EU issued a statement expressing deep concern about incidents of violence against members of political parties, and calling upon the government of Zimbabwe to bring those responsible to justice.” (UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (21 April 2016) *Zimbabwe - in-year update December 2015*)

A report published by the International Crisis Group states:

“Abductions, assaults by pro-government thugs and anti-government demonstrations met by tear gas and water cannon all signal rising levels of violence in Zimbabwe. The situation is aggravated by the government's failure to implement proposals for reform and mounting economic woes.

Zimbabwe may not be a failed state yet, but its rulers are doing nothing to prevent its collapse.

After months of empty promises of reform, President Robert Mugabe and his party, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), have set a course designed to mute criticism, criminalise political opposition and shut down any attempt to weaken their grip on power. The gloves are off.

At the same time, a renewed spirit of resistance and protest has taken hold, with an array of constituencies voicing their displeasure. Signals are multiplying of new violent confrontation to come. Under the banner of the National Electoral Reform Agenda (NERA), eighteen opposition parties including the two most influential, Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai (MDC-T) and Joice Mujuru's Zimbabwe People First (ZPF), have embarked on a series of protests that state security services are determined to stamp out.

On multiple occasions in August and September police have resorted to tear gas and water cannon to disperse anti-government demonstrations; in late August the police introduced a ban on protests in Harare. They subsequently defied a court ruling overturning the ban by extending it to mid-October. Reports of abductions and beatings of activists by militias and covert security units have increased significantly and echo previous cycles of resistance and repression. A brutal assault on 25 September by ZANU-PF supporters on four senior ZPF leaders, including Brigadier General (Rtd) Agrippa Mutambara, former ambassador to Mozambique, confirms a trajectory toward more ruthless tactics." (International Crisis Group (6 October 2016) *Confrontation in Zimbabwe Turns Increasingly Violent*)

See also International Crisis Group report which states:

"In Bikita West, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) candidate, Beauty Chabaya, promoted from its provincial women's league, won with 77.9 per cent of the vote. The opposition complained of assaults, intimidation and threats of retribution by senior ZANU-PF figures against disloyal voters – the identification of whom was easier as voting results are broken down by polling station. Local party structures and traditional authorities also helped to monitor voters and in the run-up to the poll reportedly manipulated the distribution of food aid and farming inputs." (International Crisis Group (7 February 2017) *Mugabe's Brittle By-election Victory Bodes Ill for Zimbabwe's 2018 Elections*)

The 2017 Human Rights Watch report for Zimbabwe, in a section headed "Attacks on Human Rights Defenders", states:

"In June 2016, police began a campaign of politically motivated abuses against activists engaged in countrywide protests against poverty, corruption, rights abuses, and lack of electoral reform. Police resorted to heavy-handed tactics, indiscriminately using water cannons, teargas, and batons to violently crush largely peaceful protests.

At various times since June 2016, hundreds of protesters, including student activists, human rights activists, and opposition supporters were arrested, detained, and later released on bail without charge.

For instance, on July 6, police assaulted and arbitrarily arrested, and charged with public violence, hundreds of protesters across the country, including 86 people in Bulawayo, 105 people in Harare, and 16 people in Victoria Falls. The government blocked internet access and WhatsApp text messaging for several hours to obstruct people protesting under the #Tajamuka/Sesijikile campaign led by Promise Mkwanzani and the #ThisFlag campaign led by Pastor Evan Mawarire. In August, Mawarire and his family fled to the United States after suspected state security agents threatened to kill them.” (Human Rights Watch (12 January 2017) *World Report 2017 – Zimbabwe*)

A Voice of America news report states:

“The Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP) says levels of political intolerance have reached high levels in the country with opposition party members becoming agitated and being brutalized by suspected Zanu PF activists ahead of the 2018 general elections.

In its monthly report on human rights violations in Zimbabwe titled ‘Intolerance For Opposition’, ZPP said August was a difficult time for members of the Movement for Democratic Change led by Morgan Tsvangirai and former Vice President Joice Mujuru’s Zimbabwe People First (ZimPF) party.

‘At any other time political intolerance could go unnoticed or would not be prominent as it is this August ... MDC-T and ZimPF are trying hard to grow their membership base especially in rural areas as they prepare for the 2018 general elections. Ironically, it is during this month that most rural communities are looking forward to food aid as most granaries are dry. In Zimbabwe failure to accept other political players is becoming a sad culture. “Those that are in Zanu PF believe they deserve to use state resources and determine beneficiaries. The shocking levels of intolerance have gone beyond Zanu PF and opposition but between MDC-T and ZimPF as well.” (Voice of America – Zimbabwe (28 September 2016) *Suspected Zanu PF Activists ‘Terrorizing’ MDC-T, ZimPF Members*)

An article from NewsDay refers to a nationwide strike in July 2016 as follows:

“Civil servants embarked on a nationwide strike yesterday in protest against the government’s unilateral decision to delay payment of their salaries. Pupils at most schools were yesterday sent back home, as teachers were not taking classes, while the country’s main referral hospitals reported they were working with skeletal staff and only attending to emergencies. Zimbabwe Teachers’ Association (Zimta) secretary-general John Mlilo confirmed they were downing tools, but said it was not a strike, but ‘incapacitation’.” (NewsDay (5 July 2016) *Tension as ‘Zim shutdown’ begins - NewsDay Zimbabwe*)

See also article from South African newspaper The Times which states:

“The likelihood of a national stayaway in Zimbabwe today has increased, with indications that most public servants, excluding the police and military, will boycott work as anger over government mismanagement of the economy mounts. Teachers and health professionals led the way yesterday and stayed away over unpaid salaries, a day after police used force against protesting

taxi drivers in the capital, Harare. Zimbabwe is battling its worst drought in 25 years and the economy is beset by cash shortages. Many public schools were manned by senior teaching staff yesterday, and only matrons and student nurses were on duty at hospitals.” (The Times (6 July 2016) *Protest wave rocks tense Zim*)

A report from Al Jazeera states:

“Police in Zimbabwe have fired tear gas and warning shots at demonstrators as a strike against the government's economic policies closed businesses and crippled public transport. Wednesday's strike, named 'stay-away day', followed days of unrest over the government's failure to pay civil servants' salaries, a currency shortage, import restrictions and police road blocks that were allegedly extorting cash from commercial drivers.” (Al Jazeera (7 July 2016) *Zimbabwe shuts down in protest over 'economic collapse'*)

A Voice of America news report states:

“More than 100 people, who staged protests in Harare on Monday, appeared before a Harare magistrate facing public violence charges. At the same time, there was chaos at the courts as some court officials heeded the call for a national stay-away. Magistrate Vakayi Chikwekwe remanded them in custody to Thursday pending continuation of their bail application. Lawyers representing the accused persons told the court that the police severely assaulted the accused persons, who were demonstrating in the two suburbs against numerous police road blocks, and set dogs on them. Some of the accused persons had blood-stained clothes while others could not walk on their own when they appeared in court. The defense lawyers also argued that some the accused persons were minor children who should be immediately released.” (Voice of America – Zimbabwe (6 July 2016) *100 Arrested Protesters Appear in Court as Legal Officials Join National Stay Away*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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