



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

Zimbabwe - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Tuesday 10 November 2015

Treatment of WOZA members in 2015;

A report issued in January 2015 by *Human Rights Watch* commenting on events of the preceding year states:

“...hundreds of Women of Zimbabwe (WOZA) members marched to petition parliament over the national economic situation on February 13, police violently broke up the march and dispersed the demonstrators” (Human Rights Watch (29 January 2015) *World Report 2015: Zimbabwe*).

In March 2015 the *Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights* points out that:

“To date, WOZA leadership, including Jenni Williams and RFK Human Rights Award Laureate Magadonga Mahlangu, have been routinely beaten and illegally detained over 50 times by the police” (Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights (10 March 2015) *Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Condemns Abduction of Human Rights Defender in Zimbabwe*).

A report released by *Voice of America* in May 2015 notes:

“Some journalists and members of the Women of Zimbabwe Arise were briefly held by police in Harare on Wednesday following a protest over President Robert Mugabe's recent jibe on the Kalanga people...After only a few minutes of the protest, heavily armed police officers pounced on the protestors and assaulted them. In the process, Williams and another Woza activist, Tambudzai Manangazira, were taken for questioning by police officers manning the parliament building” (Voice of America (13 May 2015) *Zimbabweans Stage Anti-Mugabe Protests in Harare*).

In October 2015 the *Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum* states in a report that:

“On 27 July Susan Sango a member of Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) was arrested by police carrying a warrant of arrest for an offence allegedly committed in 2009. Maria Tshamala, another WOZA member was also arrested on 25 July on the same case and later released on the orders of Bulawayo Magistrate Gladmore Mushove. The Magistrate recognised that the warrants of arrest were erroneously issued and therefore cancelled them. The State was advised to proceed by way of summons only after it has put its house in order. The arrests were reportedly meant to intimidate and harass WOZA activists after the organisation's successful protests against the ill treatment of citizens by State security agents” (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (27 October 2015) *Quarterly Political and Human Rights Violations Report: July - September 2015*).

The website of Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) is
<http://wozazimbabwe.org/>

Treatment of WOZA members in 2005

Freedom House reporting on 2005, states in a publication issued in December 2005 that:

“In 2005, security forces continued to disrupt demonstrations by the Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) group and arrest demonstrators; in two years of protests, some 500 WOZA activists have been detained for violating the POSA” (*Freedom House* (19 December 2005) *Freedom in the World 2006 – Zimbabwe*).

A report issued in March 2006 by the *United States Department of State* commenting on events of 2005 notes:

“Attorneys sometimes were denied access to their clients. For example, on March 31, police arrested dozens of Women of Zimbabwe Arise! (WOZA) members who were holding a prayer vigil on election day. Police beat some women and refused them medical treatment. All the women were held in an open courtyard and denied access to lawyers. Police told them that they could pay a fine and admit guilt or spend the weekend in jail and be charged under POSA. Fearing further abuse and without the benefit of legal representation, the women paid the fines” (*United States Department of State* (8 March 2006) *U.S. Department of State Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2005 – Zimbabwe*).

This document also notes that:

“...in January police in Harare arrested 11 members of WOZA for demonstrating against declining education standards. Police released the women without charges on the same day. In February police arrested more than 50 members of WOZA in Bulawayo during the group's annual Valentine's Day demonstration; the women were all quickly released” (*ibid*).

In March 2006 a report published by the *International Federation for Human Rights/World Organisation Against Torture* reviewing events of 2005 states:

“On 31 March 2005, numerous activists of Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), including women carrying babies, were arrested in African Unity's Square in Harare, where they had organised a prayer for the peace after the parliamentary ballot was held that day. Some were forced to lie on the ground and beaten with sticks by anti-riot police officers who then trampled on their bodies. Thirty WOZA members had to receive medical care and nine of them had to be hospitalised. Several women were further taken to the Harare central police station, where they had to spend the night in an open courtyard. They were denied access to a lawyer, food and sanitary facilities. They were all released on the next day, after they paid a fine for "impeding public traffic"...On 28 May 2005, Mrs. Emily Mpofu and Mrs. Zodwa Nkiwane, WOZA members, were arrested in Bulawayo during the forcible dispersion of a peaceful demonstration protesting against hunger and the high prices of food on the market. They were then forced into a car and driven in the bush outside of the city. During the whole drive, police officers Levison George Ngwenya and Jospeh Hlongwane threatened them with death. The two women's whereabouts remained unknown until 29 May 2005, when they were reported to be held at Queens Park police station. On 30 May 2005, Mrs. Mpofu and Mrs. Nkiwane appeared before the judge and were subsequently released, after being notified that they would be summoned again in the future if necessary. The hearing, scheduled for 22 September 2005, was then postponed until 19 October 2005, when they were both discharged” (*International Federation for Human Rights/World Organisation Against Torture* (22 March 2006)

Steadfast in Protest: 2005 Annual Report of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (Zimbabwe excerpt).

This report also points out that:

“On 18 June 2005, twenty WOZA members, including Mrs. Jennifer Louis Williams, and Mrs. Magodonga Mahlangu, the association's leaders, were arrested while protesting against the governmental programme of illegal buildings and premises clearance "Operation Murambatsivina". Mrs. Williams' house was further searched without a warrant, whereas WOZA members living on their sales were informed that their selling licence would not be renewed. In addition, Mrs. Siphwiwe Maseko, WOZA member, was reportedly randomly designated for being tortured at the Police Internal Security and Intelligence (PISI) head office. Mrs. Maseko was notably beaten with sticks on the back and the soles of her feet by PISI officers who threatened and intimidated her so as she would enumerate the WOZA leaders' and donors' names. She was released after two days and had to receive medical care. Whereas their demonstration was considered as illegal, the twenty women were indicted with "impeding public traffic", a charge liable with an up to three-month prison sentence or a fine, and released on bail on 20 June 2005. On 11 July 2005, however, the Bulawayo Provincial Magistrates Court ruled that "women demonstrating, and therefore moving, could not possibly block the sidewalk" and acquitted them. On the International Day of Peace, on 21 September 2005, WOZA called for two demonstrations in Harare and Bulawayo. Thirteen members were arrested in Bulawayo while chanting slogans outside the central police station. They were detained all night, after refusing to plead guilty and pay a fine. In the same time in Harare, three WOZA activists were assaulted by security forces while on their way to the city hall. One of them was reportedly brutally beaten with bludgeons” (ibid).

In July 2005 a document issued by *Amnesty International* notes that:

“*On 12 February 2005 some 50 women were arrested after a WOZA demonstration in Bulawayo to mark Valentine's Day. The women had marched with banners proclaiming "The Power of Love can conquer the Love of Power" and handed out roses to the public. Several of the women arrested were reported to be bystanders not involved in the WOZA action. Some of the women were released over the following two days – in many cases after family members paid 'admission of guilt' fines. However, at least two women remained in custody until 15 February. None of the women was taken to court to face any charges. While in custody women were reportedly threatened by police officers and denied food...On the evening of 31 March, the day of Zimbabwe's Parliamentary elections, police arrested approximately 260 women, some carrying babies, when WOZA attempted to hold a peaceful post-election prayer vigil at Africa Unity Square in Harare. During and after the arrests, several of the WOZA activists were badly beaten. Some were forced to lie on the ground and were beaten on the buttocks by police officers. Several of the women were seriously injured and subsequently hospitalized. None were given access to adequate medical treatment during their detention. The women and children were detained overnight in an open-air courtyard, under armed guard. The detainees were initially denied access to lawyers. Police reportedly told the women that they could pay a fine if they pleaded guilty to minor offences under MOA, and would be released. However if they did not pay the fine, they were told they would remain in detention over the weekend until 4 April (when the courts re-opened) to face charges under POSA. Over the course of 1 April all of the women – several of whom were elderly, injured or with their children – elected to pay fines rather than spend the weekend in the cells, during which time they could be subjected to further

harassment, threats and poor conditions. Once again MOA was used to elicit “admissions” of guilt. Amnesty International believes that in this case the “admissions” of guilt were elicited under duress and constitute an abuse of due process and the rule of law” (Amnesty International (20 July 2005) *Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA!)*).

In May 2005 the *Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum* states:

“Police allegedly disrupted a Women Of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) peaceful prayer vigil at around 19:10 hrs in Africa Unity Square in Harare. The vigil of 150 women was set to continue throughout the night. The purpose of the vigil was to pray for peace in the post election period and to pray for divine intervention to prevent the results being manipulated as had been reported in connection with the 2000 and 2002 elections. The riot police allegedly arrived and started assaulting the women, 20 of whom had babies strapped on their backs. It is reported that over 30 women had to be treated for injuries and 9 were hospitalised for severe beatings to their backs and thighs. A further 74 women reportedly received medical treatment a few days later. The police details allegedly forced the women to lie on their stomachs while the police walked over them with booted feet. Twenty five of the women, including WOZA leader Jenny Williams, and at least 2 international journalists were reportedly arrested although the journalists were released after about 2 hours without further inconvenience. The women spent the night in custody claiming that they were under armed guard and were released the following morning. They were charged under the Miscellaneous Offences Act (MOA) S 3(2) g with obstruction of thoroughfares.. They were required to pay a fine of Z\$25,000 each. Other women who were on their way to the vigil from Bulawayo and other areas in Harare were allegedly assaulted by the police who purposefully descended on the Railway Station in Harare for that purpose (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (19 May 2005) *Zimbabwe: Political violence report - Mar 2005*, p.5).

In May 2005 *Amnesty International* comments that:

“In the first three months of 2005 when Amnesty International was researching this report no less than 300 WOZA activists were arrested or detained by police on four separate occasions” (Amnesty International (10 May 2005) *Zimbabwe: Human rights defenders under siege*).

Amnesty International in April 2005 points out that:

“Amnesty International is outraged at the arrest of more than 250 women after Zimbabwe police broke up a peaceful post-election prayer gathering in Harare yesterday evening. According to reports received by Amnesty International, police beat several of the women during and after arrest. Some were beaten on their buttocks after being made to lie on the ground; others were beaten while getting out of police vehicles, apparently for not moving fast enough. A number of the women are reported to be badly injured. The prayer gathering was organised by the grassroots group, Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), in Harare's Africa Unity Square” (Amnesty International (1 April 2005) *Zimbabwe: More than 250 women arrested - some badly beaten*).

ZimOnline in August 2005 states:

“About 400 members of the Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) activist group wearing black armbands on Monday marched through Zimbabwe's second largest

city of Bulawayo protesting against human rights violations allegedly by President Robert Mugabe and his government...The protests by WOZA come barely two weeks after 29 of the group's activists escaped possible jail after a magistrate dismissed charges against them that they obstructed traffic during a protest last June against the government's controversial urban clean-up campaign" (ZimOnline (2 August 2005) *Zimbabwe: 400 women activists take to the streets over Mugabe's rights abuses*).

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre 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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