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## **HUMANITARIAN CRISIS - SIEGE ON ZIMBABWEAN OPPOSITION**

The siege on the opposition Movement for Democratic Change over the past nine weeks has created a new humanitarian crisis.

There have been over 200 documented cases of torture and brutality following the illegal abductions and arrests of MDC members, officials and activists. That is however, the tip of the iceberg. These are only the documented cases, the people who come in for medical treatment, operations and hospitalisation. The hundreds who have been beaten randomly as they walk home in the high density suburbs, the people who are pulled off commuter buses and beaten in the street, all those who were ordered out of their houses prior to the ZCTU stay away, and beaten with batons, as a warning not to stay away from work – these are the people who have not been documented individually and who have not come for medical treatment.

The reasons for not seeking treatment or help will be due to fear or lack of resources, and many will not know that there is help available to them. Many of those beaten randomly in the streets and off buses are not necessarily opposition or civic society organisation member's – they are beaten because it is state organised and sanctioned, to create a climate of fear and submission.

Approximately 80% of Zimbabweans are unemployed, and many of those fortunate enough to be employed, are paid way below the minimum wage. One can safely say that the majority of Zimbabweans are living well below the poverty datum line, as even the minimum wage earners would not be able to afford the basic monthly commodities.

In many instances, till operators and shop assistants are finding that their bus fares to and from work on a daily basis exceed their monthly earnings.

### **The crisis**

The majority of MDC members and activists are unemployed. They survive from day to day, by pushing carts, selling air time cards etc. They are living from hand to mouth. So when they are abducted and imprisoned by the state agents, it leaves their families with no means of support.

The party has very, very limited resources and is having to:

\*Provide food for the political detainees at Remand Prison and Police cells on a daily basis.

\*Provide bus fares for a family member to visit daily.

\*Provide the basic necessities for survival to the families while their breadwinner is incarcerated.

\*Provide soap, toothpaste, and towels to those in the remand prison.

\*Provide transport and fuel to those members who are collecting and delivering food and assistance, uplifting the injured and tortured for medical treatment, and ensuring

that those in hospital are visited and looked after.

The cost of this very necessary humanitarian exercise is huge.

From previous experience we know that the current wave of abductions, arrests, torture and violence will continue unabated until the elections in March 2008. There will be periods where it may lessen, but it will continue. Many of the CIO and military intelligence perpetrators of the torture have told their victims that they will not rest until every member, official and activist of the MDC has been arrested and tortured. They have said that by 2008 there will be no MDC left, that it will have been smashed.

So, we have a very real challenge ahead of us. We need to continue supporting our courageous members and their families, as well as those jailed and tortured, we need to remain resolute and strong. We need to continue with a peaceful, and non-violent campaign for peace and democracy, and to this end we will need all the help we can get, especially in terms of fuel and basic food commodities.

While Zanu PF may be powerful now, through the use of violence and torture, we will remain PRAYERFUL.

Nelson Mandela said:

*"What challenges us is to ensure that none should enjoy lesser rights; and none tormented because they are born different, hold contrary political views, or pray to God in a different manner".*

Aluta continua – the struggle continues