

Release our brothers and sisters in Zimbabwe now! Activists to rally in Johannesburg TODAY

13 March 2007 - Today, under the unified banner of the Save Zimbabwe Campaign, a diverse coalition of South African and Zimbabwean groups will rally at 12noon at the Zimbabwe Consulate in Johannesburg to demand the immediate and unconditional release of detained political and civil society leaders in Zimbabwe.

More than 30 opposition party and civil society activists were unlawfully assaulted and arrested on Sunday while attempting to attend a peaceful prayer meeting in Harare, organised by the Save Zimbabwe Campaign. One member of the opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) was brutally shot and killed by police.

MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai is among those detained. He and fellow activists have been severely beaten by the police and have so far been denied access to lawyers.

"The Zimbabwe state has launched a full scale attack on human rights in Zimbabwe," said Roy Bennett, former MDC parliamentarian currently in exile in South Africa. "These peaceful activists have been viciously assaulted, beaten and tortured for exercising their internationally protected freedoms of expression and assembly."

Activists are calling this a climax in the spiralling increase of violations of fundamental rights and civil liberties in Zimbabwe. Over the past few years, repressive laws aimed at stifling space for any opposition have systematically crushed the independent press, ensured most peaceful demonstrations result in arrest and detention and have curtailed peaceful civil society organisations.

"Silent diplomacy has not and will not work. South Africans must take a stand," said Nicholas Mkaronda, executive director of Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition. "We will unite tomorrow to call upon African governments to break their silence - to speak out loudly against the flagrant state-led human rights abuses perpetrated against our brothers and sisters in Zimbabwe."

Organisations rallying in Johannesburg tomorrow will include, Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, MDC, ZTAP, ZAM, CIVICUS, Zimbabwe Torture Victims Project, Freedom House, Open Society Institute of Southern Africa.

The Save Zimbabwe Campaign is the largest coalition of groups in Zimbabwe, which unites the previously divided MDC, as well as labour unions, students, churches, youths, women's organisations and other political parties.

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