



**Statement on
the Arrests of Civil Society Activists on Sunday 11 March 2007 and subsequent
events**

The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, a coalition of sixteen human rights NGOs, joins civil society leaders in condemning the brutal force used by the police in stopping a gathering sponsored by the Christian Alliance and the Save Zimbabwe Campaign in Harare on Sunday 11 March 2007.

The banning of public meetings in certain areas of the country, under the seriously flawed Public Order and Security Act, will have the cumulative effect of creating a de facto state of emergency where democratic space will cease to exist.

The state, through its law enforcement agents, has created conditions of brutality, reportedly subjected those arrested to torture and denied them access to their lawyers and to medical assistance; this despite a High Court order that access should be granted. Torture is absolutely prohibited under international law and there is no basis whatsoever for the authorities in Zimbabwe to resort to it.

This flagrant defiance of a ruling of the High Court is a practical demonstration of the President's unfortunate and provocative statement, reported in the Herald on 27 July 2002 at a reception to mark the opening of Parliament, that judges should be objective and "if they are not objective, don't blame us when we defy them".

There were allegations and counter-allegations of violence by state agents and opposition youth at the meeting on Sunday, and one death reported, none of which can be condoned but where a state attempts to close down all democratic space and

brutalises and savagely beats people who demonstrate their constitutional rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, a viscous cycle of violence emerges.

Article 21(1) of our Constitution guarantees political choice to all Zimbabweans but in the stifling environment in which the country finds itself, this right is being ignored and denied. The relevant article lays down that *“no person shall be hindered in his freedom of assembly and association . . . and in particular to form or belong to political parties or trade unions or other associations for the protection of his interests.”*

Furthermore, the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, the United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, the UN Universal Declaration of Rights and the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights are being contravened by law enforcement officers with continuing impunity and increasing frequency.

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13 March 2007