




## Zimbabwe: Ongoing risks for human rights defenders in the context of political deadlock and pre-electoral period

 Zimbabwe\_Mission Report\_Ongoing risks for human rights defenders in the context of political deadlock and pre-electoral period  
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**Paris-Geneva, November 26, 2012. *The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), has published today the report "Zimbabwe: Ongoing risks for human rights defenders in the context of political deadlock and pre-electoral period".***

More than four years after the adoption of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) between the two major political parties in Zimbabwe, following the 2008 major crises that resulted in grave human rights violations, human rights defenders continue to be harassed, marginalised and victims of repeated human rights violations. Impunity and a lack of justice for past abuses also remain a serious concern.

The report analyses multiple forms of harassment facing human rights defenders while they try to do their work, including police summons, disruption of assemblies and protests, police violence, propaganda and slandering, threats of organization closure, and deterrence from participating in international and regional meetings. They remain the target of arbitrary arrests and detentions. Most of these violations are instigated by the police, members of the Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF), militias and traditional leaders. The Censorship Board and the Provincial Governors also take a stance against anyone deemed to run counter the interests of Zanu-PF.

Some of these acts are facilitated by repressive legislation related to "public order". These contribute to maintaining an extensively restrictive environment impeding NGOs from carrying out their activities. In particular, the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) remains widely used to ban public meetings, further restraining freedom of peaceful assembly. The POSA, as well as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) and the Criminal Law (Law Reform and Codification) Act are still used to threaten, harass, criminalise and intimidate civil society actors.

Thanks to a legal emergency response project implemented by national NGOs, no human rights defender has been convicted since 2003. However, despite judicial progress, authorities continue to use excessive preventive detention to silence human rights defenders.

In such a grim situation, with a referendum for a new Constitution and the next general elections approaching, which shall take place respectively at the end of 2012 and in March 2013, the Observatory fears that once again human rights defenders will fall victim to a potential rise in violence and a crackdown on civil society due, in particular, to the substantiated collusion between security forces and the presidential party.

*"Almost four years after the conclusion of the GPA, and despite the repeated calls from the international community, the situation of human rights defenders in Zimbabwe remains extremely perilous",* deplored Souhayr Belhassen, FIDH President. *"Besides the need for radical change in the authorities' methods, it is of vital importance that the reforming process be completed in conformity to international and regional human rights standards. In particular, the first step is that a new Constitution has to enter into force as soon as possible in order to ensure that human rights are effectively guaranteed",* she added.

*"It is time that the Zimbabwean authorities stop resorting to legislation that restrict fundamental freedoms as well as encouraging and condoning serious violations of the rights of human rights defenders, including arbitrary arrests or acts of torture",* added Gerald Staberock, OMCT Secretary General. *"Accordingly, the authorities must take all the necessary steps to ensure that human rights defenders are able to operate efficiently and without hindrances in the country, as well as to put an end to the climate of impunity that still prevails within the society",* he concluded.

The Observatory has respectfully urged Zimbabwean authorities to pay close attention to its recommendations, to take the necessary steps to create and maintain a safe and conducive environment for human rights defenders to operate freely and efficiently in the country. This includes fully recognising the legitimate role played by human rights organisations, releasing all human rights defenders detained for exercising human rights activities, ending judicial harassment and fully investigating abuses faced by human rights defenders.

**You can download the report at the following link:**  
**[http://www.omct.org/files/2012/11/22036/zimbabwe\\_mission\\_report.pdf](http://www.omct.org/files/2012/11/22036/zimbabwe_mission_report.pdf)**

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