

## **Urgent Appeal for Solidarity by Zimbabwean Women to African Women and Women All Over the World**

### **Overview on the Situation in Zimbabwe**

On March 29, 2008 Zimbabwe went to the polls to elect its next government to lead through 2013. Results for the Presidential election were announced a month later and people in Zimbabwe maintained peace. From April 2, 2008 the government organized a retribution campaign to target those who allegedly voted for the opposition. Since then, there have been terror campaigns particularly in rural Zimbabwe. Youth militia, under the command of the army and police, confirmed to have gone on to unleash terror in a campaign to teach the rural people how to correctly vote in the forthcoming presidential run off, supposedly taking place on May 23 according to the law, but whose date remains unannounced. [Now delayed to June 27].

As a result of the terror campaign by the military and the youth militia, the most affected are women and children as 80% of Zimbabwean women live in the rural areas. So far, over 800 homes have been burnt down, over 10,000 people have fled their homes, over 40 people have been shot dead in cold blood, over 7,000 teachers have fled their schools as a number have been beaten in the eyes of parents and pupils. Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights reports that over 2000 serious cases of physical torture and beatings have passed through their hands and a lot of those they treated have suffered serious fractures to an extent that most are permanently handicapped. The oldest victim of the post election violence is an old woman with 12 grandchildren all of them orphaned and whose son is alleged to have campaigned for the opposition. The youngest female victim is a 15-year old girl who was stripped naked together with her pregnant mother forced to lie down and beaten on the breasts and buttocks. Many women including the old have been forced to strip naked and beaten on the breasts and buttocks. Over 7,000 teachers, a third of them women, have fled their homes and several schools mostly in rural areas are closed. Several girls and women are feared raped. The youngest child seriously assaulted is only 3 years old. Despite calls from all corners of the world for the violence to stop, it has become worse and we fear more and more people are getting killed and buried.

Our situation is such that an estimated 5 million Zimbabweans mostly professionals and the young have left the country. An estimated 3 million are in South Africa with half being illegal immigrants facing inhuman deportations daily. Women cross border traders cross over the crocodile infested Limpopo River and many have been allegedly raped. HIV and AIDS prevalence is 60% among women and girls and their life expectancy is 34 years. Domestic violence is rife with a woman killed or left for dead weekly. Unemployment is 80% and inflation is 165 000 % and the highest in the world. In 2005, the government-led Operation Restore Order made 200,000 women homeless and jobless, their homes were demolished, as were the markets that earned them an income. It's estimated that 95% of those women were left in the open cold and as a result engaged in commercial sex work. Now the same women are alleged to have voted for the opposition and have gone through torture because of how they voted. At least 6,800 girls get raped annually in Zimbabwe and with the current displacements the number is expected to triple. Most female teachers have been displaced and many have fled the country and a lot more have sought refuge in the cities. Access to the rural areas has always been a big challenge for humanitarian organizations but now that the militia and the army hold women in the rural areas hostage, the rural areas have been declared no-go areas. As a result, we have seen it almost impossible to assist. Women Directors of NGO's are on the government hit list that seeks to arrest, detain and destroy the organizations. Zimbabwean women in rural areas constitute women abandoned by husbands and dumped in the rural areas because of their HIV status. These women have gone through the war of liberation in the 1960s and 1970s and war songs by the youth militias at their doorsteps have left them semi-slaved. The worst is that they have been beaten because their husbands, brothers, uncles, boyfriends, grandsons and other male relatives allegedly campaigned for the opposition. Old grandmothers struggling to feed orphans and the sick, women who are bed ridden, orphaned HIV-positive children - the poorest and weakest have been tortured, terrified, displaced from homes and the organizations that normally help them are denied access with most of the leaders on the government hit list.

## OUR URGENT APPEAL FOR ACTION TO AFRICAN WOMEN AND WOMEN ALL OVER THE WORLD

- First we come to you because we have exhausted all channels and have failed to get help and urgent attention. Please help us find how best we can deal with the situation and appeal to anyone you know who can help victims get immediate help like medication, safe shelter, counselling and support leaders of women's groups with security as they are also under threat and have been victimized and most of them are on the government hit list for those to be tortured and eliminated
- Reach out to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU) countries to put in place measures to protect women and girls fleeing Zimbabwe to take refuge in neighbouring countries
- Help us to see how we can use the AU protocol for women's rights for protection of women and girls. Zimbabwe ratified the AU protocol
- Help us get SADC and UN put in place as a security and protection plan for women and girls and help demilitarize the youth militia and stop torture of ordinary citizens
- Get our case on crimes against humanity taken to the UN Security Council. We have all the documented evidence since the terror started in 2000 to have the perpetrators brought to justice
- Mobilize female ministers and female vice Presidents to convene an urgent meeting in the region and make appeals to the Liberian President, Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to help us broker peace talks in Zimbabwe with leaders of women's groups in the continent included
- Help us set up African women in solidarity with Zimbabwe women focal point persons in African countries who go to their Presidents to lobby them to come to the urgent rescue of Zimbabwean women
- Pass on this message to any networks you know and those who can assist should email [coalition@zol.co.zw](mailto:coalition@zol.co.zw) or [dakotareed07@gmail.com](mailto:dakotareed07@gmail.com) and we will refer you to all the women in Zimbabwe working in various areas

FROM WOMEN IN ZIMBABWE

13 MAY 2009, MIAMI, NIGER