



# International Institute for Justice and Development<sup>SM</sup>

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## *IIJD Call for Action*

*April/May 2007*

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## **Democratic Hopes for Zimbabwe Threatened by Government Repression**

The International Institute for Justice and Development (IIJD), Inc. calls upon the international community to help resolve the alarming situation in Zimbabwe before any more lives are lost and before the conflict develops into further civil unrest.

Although Zimbabwe has been struggling under the dictatorship of President Robert Mugabe for years, the most recent developments originated at a prayer meeting in Harare on March 11<sup>th</sup>. As a result of the violent conflict, 50 protesters along with their leader and founder of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Morgan Tsvangirai were arrested (and later released). One of the protesters, Gift Tandare, was reported dead by gun shot fired by the police. The weeks following the prayer meeting have brought about more reports of human rights violations and disappointment over the much anticipated meeting of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. According to reports by the Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, the government forces are now targeting the general public in addition to the active protesters, entering private homes and assaulting civilians. The SADC meeting resulted in nominating President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa to facilitate talks between the opposition and the government. However, no specific goals or detailed schedules were disclosed. Instead, the West was asked to lift all economic sanctions and rather “engage diplomatically”. The IIJD is concerned by this methodological use of excessive force by the police and calls for the international community to take a stronger stance against the systematic dismantling of democratic processes and silencing of opposition by the Mugabe administration.

The recent crisis follows a three-month government ban – issued on February 20<sup>th</sup> – on all peaceful demonstrations. The IIJD is concerned by these restrictions of freedom of expression and believes that all people should be able to express their opinion without the threat of punishment – physical or otherwise. The recent developments have shown that the ban does not simply involve violent protests but everything from peaceful demonstrations to prayer meetings. This is a serious threat to the rights of the Zimbabwean citizens, and calls for international attention and involvement. Those in positions of leadership should advise and encourage the Zimbabwean government to address the root causes behind the current tensions and the prevailing economic problems in the country.

The IIJD believes that it is vital for Zimbabwe's neighbors, the African Union, and the UN to express strong criticism toward the recent developments. To this day, Mugabe has rejected all international criticism and instead threatened to expel foreign diplomats, who side with the



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opposition. It is clear that the tactics employed by the current leadership pose a serious threat to democracy, peace and stability in the region. Countries with totalitarian-like regimes should not be tolerated. In order to prevent conflicts and civil war in Zimbabwe, the current discriminatory policies and brutal treatment of opposition need to be discontinued. The stakeholders in the international community need to ensure that all Zimbabweans have a voice through fair elections. It is these rights that the IIJD calls to protect.

As found at the first International Conference on State of Affairs of Africa (ICSAA), dysfunctional systems of governance, supported by poor leadership and inept economic and political institutions established after colonization are the root cause of Africa's development crisis. Zimbabwe is currently experiencing an inflation rate of 1,700 percent – highest in the world – with predictions as high as 4,000 percent by the end of this year (World Bank). The country is experiencing constant shortages of stable food items, such as flour, sugar, and maize, as well as fuel and foreign exchange shortages. To make matters worse, this year's maize harvest is expected to be only one third of what is needed to feed the population (UN FAO). The IIJD believes that positive change for the millions of impoverished and suffering Zimbabweans is possible only through radical change in the government's attitude and treatment of opposition parties and the incorporation of greater political diversity. As an organization working toward justice and democratic development, the IIJD believes that emphasis on democratic rule needs to be re-established through institutional reforms and a clear separation between the executive, legislative and judicial branches. The development of an independent judiciary and access to free and fair justice system will be an important factor in advancing democracy, protecting human rights, and assuring sustainability. Only through the reform of the system of governance in Zimbabwe can we compact the prevailing corruption, demand accountability, secure investment, and create an incentive for educated, capable citizens to stay and contribute to Zimbabwe's future.

The IIJD will continue to monitor the developing situation in Zimbabwe and trusts that the international community and the individuals in leadership positions will respond to this Call for Action.