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March 27, 2007

President Robert Mugabe
Government of Zimbabwe
Munhumutapa
Samora Machel, Causey Way
Harare
ZIMBABWE

Dear President Mugabe:

We are writing to protest the assaults on, torture and denial of medical treatment to peaceful members of the opposition party and civil society activists by police and other security personnel of your government. As an organization that mobilizes the voices of physicians across the United States, we demand that all governments, including our own, refrain from torture and denial of medical care to individuals at the hands of the police or while in their custody.

After the attacks on the demonstrators on March 11 and 12, medical care was significantly delayed by officials of your government that in some cases led to aggravation of the harms from the injuries sustained. Such care was delayed even after a court order was issued on March 12.

Our medical colleagues in Zimbabwe who personally treated the injured report that of the 64 persons injured, 20 remain hospitalized. The injuries sustained included five individuals with fractures to the hands, arms or legs, three of whom sustained multiple fractures; and severe, extensive and multiple soft tissue injuries to the back, buttocks, arms and shoulders of 14 individuals. Three received head injuries, two with deep lacerations in the scalp. Another individual sustained a split right earlobe and one person may have a severely ruptured bowel from blows to the abdomen.

Two women who were tortured and suffered severe injuries as a result, Grace Kwinjeh and Sekai Holland, were not only denied access to treatment but were prevented from boarding an air ambulance. While attempting to board a plane, there were taken from the airport in Harare and brought to a police station, where their travel documents were confiscated. They were instead taken to a local clinic, where they were placed under armed guard. Another individual who had been tortured on 11 March was also attacked at the Harare International Airport a week later, sustaining fractures and multiple lacerations in his face.

One individual denied medical treatment suffered a hemorrhage leading to severe anemia that required a blood transfusion. Another person who was denied timely medical treatment developed an infection of deep soft tissues.

This conduct appears to be part of a pattern of abuses by security forces. On 12 March, two individuals were shot while attending a funeral of someone who had been killed by the police.

The severe attacks by the police are inexcusable; the denial of medical care is an additional and egregious violation of human rights. We demand that the government of Zimbabwe end torture and assaults on people and end interference in or denial of medical care to people in severe need on political or any other grounds. The only way out of the current crisis is for your government to restore respect for all human rights of the people of Zimbabwe, including free expression, personal security, health and economic well-being.

Sincerely,



Leonard S. Rubenstein, JD
Executive Director

CC:

Simbarashe Mumbengegwi, Foreign Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Machinvenyika Tobias Mapuranga, Ambassador, Embassy of Zimbabwe, Washington DC

Christopher W. Dell, Ambassador to Zimbabwe, Embassy of the United States, Harare

Dr. Jendayl E. Frazer, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, United States Department of State, Washington DC