Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's Refworld website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment, please email the Knowledge and Information Management Unit.

ZWE105171.E

Zimbabwe: Whether the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) is still active in Canada; location of MDC branches and chapters outside of Zimbabwe; whether MDC branches outside of Zimbabwe can verify the identity and replace the lost membership cards of those members who were originally issued cards in Zimbabwe; whether the MDC membership cards display the date of original membership

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Information on the operations of the MDC in Canada was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. The following information was provided by the Coordinator of the International Liaison Office of the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, a coalition of 21 human rights NGOs in Zimbabwe that promotes and protects the human rights of Zimbabwean citizens (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum n.d.). The Coordinator obtained information from personal interviews conducted with official representatives of the MDC-USA and MDC-UK branches. The former chairman of MDC-Toronto was also able to provide information for this Response.

1. MDC in Canada and in other locations outside of Zimbabwe

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Coordinator of the International Liaison Office at the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum reported that the MDC has 15 "provinces" [or party jurisdictions]; 12 are within Zimbabwe and 3 are located outside of Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 5 May 2015). The three "provinces" operating outside of Zimbabwe are in South Africa, the UK and the US (ibid.). According to the Coordinator, Canada is "considered to be part of the USA province" (ibid.). While Canada may have "branch" or "district" offices, "MDC Canada would be administered from the USA" (ibid. 15 May 2015). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the former chairman of MDC-Toronto similarly stated that to his knowledge, there are no active MDC structures in Canada (MDC 19 May 2015). The same source noted that the MDC Toronto Branch was operational from 22 December 2005 until September 2009; it ceased to exist after the MDC National Council resolved that MDC-Canada be amalgamated with MDC-USA (ibid.). The former chairman further stated that there were also MDC-Canada branches in St. Catharines, Hamilton, and Edmonton before the incorporation of MDC-Canada into MDC-USA (ibid.). According to the Coordinator, there are no "physical offices" of the MDC in Canada or the US; all processes and operations are coordinated virtually from members' homes and other facilities (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 14 May 2015).

1.1 Extent of MDC Operations Outside of Zimbabwe

Article 6.10 of the MDC Constitution, entitled "Party Members Outside Zimbabwe," states the following:
6.10.1 Any Zimbabwean living outside Zimbabwe shall be eligible to be a Member of the Party

6.10.2 Any group of Party members living outside Zimbabwe in any country shall have the right to form External Bra[n]ches and External Wards in their areas of residence depending on the population and geographical area of that particular country.

6.10.3 Notwithstanding anything to the contrary in this Constitution, all members outside Zimbabwe and all external structures shall organize themselves into External Branches

6.10.4 All activities of external structures shall be organised around and by the External Branch. (MDC 30 Apr. 2011)

According to the Coordinator, the extent to which provincial structures outside of Zimbabwe operate is "a matter of debate and interpretation" (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 5 May 2015). The Coordinator added that the activities of MDC-UK are far more "organized" than the other two foreign provincial jurisdictions (ibid.). The same source reported that operations within Canada are "not as active and well-structured" as operations within the US, South Africa, and the UK (ibid.).

2. Membership Cards

2.1 Content and Issuance

The Coordinator stated that MDC membership cards are in paper form and display the date that an individual joined the party (ibid.). The same source added that there is a lack of standards on the appearance of membership cards between the MDC provincial arms (ibid.). The former chairman similarly stated that there are "various membership cards now in circulation" (MDC 19 May 2015).

According to the Coordinator, there are different processes for issuing membership cards across the provinces (ibid.). Since March 2015, MDC-USA has issued membership cards electronically (ibid.). This system involves members creating accounts online at www.mdczim.com; their information is then captured in Harare, Zimbabwe and cards are mailed back to North America to be distributed either individually by post or during party meetings (ibid. 14 May 2015). The Coordinator noted that this online portal was originally launched in July 2014, but that after some party members experienced "authentication issues," party leader Morgan Tsvangirai proposed a second re-launch of the online platform as part of the MDC "reorganization and renewal" strategy (ibid. 5 May 2015). According to the same source, the web portal is still in its "initial phase" and not all provinces issue membership cards in this way (ibid. 14 May 2015). In the UK for example, application forms are sent to applicants by party structures; once a "sizable" number of applications are collected, they are sent on to Zimbabwe for processing and then membership cards would be sent back from Harare (ibid. 5 May 2015).

2.2 Whether MDC branches outside of Zimbabwe can verify members' identity and replace lost membership cards

According to the Coordinator, party structures in countries outside of Zimbabwe are able to both issue and verify the validity of an MDC membership card (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 5 May 2015). Further and corroborating information, including whether MDC branches replace lost membership cards that were issued by another branch, could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References


_____. 14 May 2015. Correspondence from the coordinator to the Research Directorate.

_____. 5 May 2015. Correspondence from the coordinator to the Research Directorate.


**Additional Sources Consulted**

**Oral sources:** Attempts to contact the following were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: MDC-UK; MDC-USA; Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights.

**Internet sites, including:** Al Jazeera; AllAfrica; Amnesty International; BBC; Brookings Institution; *Daily News*; ecoi.net; Factiva; Freedom House; *The Guardian*; *The Herald*; Human Rights Watch; *The Lusaka Times*; MDC-UK; MDC-USA; MDC-Zimbabwe; *The New York Times*; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; Reuters; SABC News; US – Central Intelligence Agency, Department of State; *The Telegraph*; *The Washington Post*; The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights.

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