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Zimbabwe: The Green Bombers or the youth militia; whether it is still operating; its leadership; whether it commits human rights abuses and if so, whether the militia's abuses have been reported to the police and police response; whether it targets MDC supporters (2001 - 2006)

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The Green Bombers

The Green Bombers, so named because of their green uniforms (IWPR 25 Feb. 2005; UN 23 Jan. 2004; Solidarity Peace Trust 5 Sept. 2003, 25), are also commonly referred to as the "youth militia" (ibid.; Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum Nov. 2005, 37; BBC 29 Feb. 2004) and the "Zanu-PF militia" (Solidarity Peace Trust 5 Sept. 2003, 25; *Country Reports 2005* 8 Mar. 2006). The youth militia are trainees of Zimbabwe's National Youth Service (NYS) program (VOA 25 Feb. 2005; Solidarity Peace Trust 5 Sept. 2003, 25), established in 2001 (ibid., 10). The NYS program has reportedly involved military training (VOA 25 Feb. 2005; Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers 17 Nov. 2004; Solidarity Peace Trust 5 Sept. 2003, 10), including weapons training (ibid.; BBC 29 Feb. 2004) and lessons in the doctrines of the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF) (ibid.; *The Independent* 30 Mar. 2005; *Zimbabwe Independent* 12 May 2006; UN 23 Jan. 2004; see also *Country Reports 2005* 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 5). A 2004 BBC documentary on the NYS indicated that youths in the program's training camps have also been taught to torture and kill (29 Feb. 2004).

According to a 12 May 2006 *Zimbabwe Independent* news article, the Green Bombers are developing into "one of the most serious violators of human rights." The youth militia is allegedly responsible for such crimes as torture, rape (BBC 29 Feb. 2004; *Zimbabwe Independent* 12 May 2006; ZimOnline 14 June 2005), murder (ibid.; BBC 29 Feb. 2004; Solidarity Peace Trust 5 Sept. 2003, 10), setting up road blocks (ibid., 33; *Zimbabwe Independent* 12 May 2006), destroying property (ibid.; Solidarity Peace Trust 5 Sept. 2003, 10), and disrupting activities of the political opposition (ibid., 33; *Zimbabwe Independent* 12 May 2006).

Leadership

No information could be found on any one particular leader of the Green Bombers among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate; however, a 2003 report by Solidarity Peace Trust, a non-governmental organization

committed to supporting human rights in Zimbabwe (Solidarity Peace Trust n.d.), indicated that the youth militia is often led by war veterans [i.e., veterans of Zimbabwe's liberation war of the 1970s, who are "fiercely loyal" to the ruling party, Zanu-PF (IWPR 31 May 2006)] (Solidarity Peace Trust 5 Sept. 2003, 11).

Targeting of MDC supporters

According to a 2003 report by Solidarity Peace Trust, the "most common targets" of the Green Bombers have been individuals thought to be supporters of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) (5 Sept. 2003, 10; see also *Country Reports 2005* 8 Mar. 2006), Zimbabwe's main opposition party (ibid.). The Green Bombers have reportedly been used by the ruling ZANU-PF to "harass," "intimidate" (*Country Reports 2005* 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 1.c; see also IWRP 24 Jan. 2005), torture, and kill (BBC 29 Feb. 2004; ZimOnline 14 June 2005) MDC supporters. They have also allegedly been used to "terrorize" MDC supporters during election periods (IWPR 31 May 2006; AI 15 Mar. 2005, 6; see also IWPR 1 Apr. 2005 and BBC 29 Feb. 2004).

According to a 2004 BBC Panorama documentary on Zimbabwe's NYS training camps, youths at the camps are taught that the main political opposition, the MDC, is an enemy of the state (BBC 29 Feb. 2004; see also *Country Reports 2005* 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 5). The documentary noted that

The youths are taught Mugabe's own version of history. The manual they learn from is written by the President himself. The lesson is simple and racist. Mugabe and his party Zanu, are the heroes of the blacks. The opposition party, the MDC is backed by the whites and is bad. Questioning this is forbidden (BBC 29 Feb. 2004).

The documentary also reported the planned use of the Green Bombers during the country's 2005 elections (ibid.). A camp commander interviewed for the documentary stated that the camp's youths "are going to be used by the ruling party. Our main concern is that we keep [the MDC] out of power, right or wrong" (ibid.).

According to *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2005*, individuals and military persons believed to be MDC supporters were taken out of the civil service (8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 3).

Police Response

Several sources consulted by the Research Directorate suggest that, in general, the Green Bombers have been allowed to carry out their activities with impunity (*Country Reports 2005* 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 1.c; ZimOnline 5 May 2005; AI 15 Mar. 2005, 6; BBC 29 Feb. 2004; Solidarity Peace Trust 5 Sept. 2003, 51; *The Guardian* 19 Feb. 2003). It has also been suggested that the Green Bombers may be acting in collaboration with the police (Solidarity Peace Trust 5 Sept. 2003, 50; see also *The Guardian* 19 Feb. 2003).

In a few cases, the authorities have taken action against the militia; however, it is usually only when the police or the army has been attacked by the militia that action has been taken against them (Solidarity Peace Trust 5 Sept. 2003, 50-51). A 2003 Solidarity Peace Trust report stated that

[the Green Bombers] are most likely to incur the wrath of the state if they directly confront state agencies, through usurping their authority or attacking them. Attacks by the militia on ordinary citizens, on the other hand, are given *de facto* impunity by the police, in the vast majority of cases (ibid., 51).

According to a 25 May 2005 news article by ZimOnline, a Zimbabwean daily independent news service (ZimOnline n.d.), many Green Bombers have been recruited as reserves in the police force (ibid. 25 May 2005; see also *The Independent* 30 Mar. 2005 and AI 15 Mar. 2005, 5). In a March 2005 report, Amnesty International (AI) indicated that it had

received reports of known youth militia members wearing police uniforms, in circumstances where it is unclear if they are officially recruited into the police service or simply being given uniforms (15 Mar. 2005, 5).

The AI report further noted that many victims do not report their encounters with the Green Bombers to the police because of the belief that no action would be taken (AI 15 Mar. 2005, 5-6) and/or out of fear of reprisal (ibid., 5).

Level of Activity

According to a 2005 Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum report, the number of NYS training camps has decreased since 2002 and the activities of the youths "seem to have declined," likely as a result of "budgetary constraints" (Nov. 2005, 37).

In a 12 May 2006 newspaper article, *Zimbabwe Independent* reported that all of the NYS training camps across Zimbabwe had been shut down because of food and resource shortages (12 May 2006). The newspaper article also noted that since the last recruitment of youths in 2005, there had been no new recruits to the NYS (*Zimbabwe Independent* 12 May 2006). No information on when, or whether, the NYS training camps would be reopened could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. No information on the Green Bombers' activities since the camps were reportedly closed could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

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 additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Oral sources: Solidarity Peace Trust provided links to published documents. Zimrights did not provide information within the time constraints of this Response.

Internet sites, including: All Africa, Amnesty International (AI), Center on Conscience and War, Factiva, Freedom House, Human Rights Forum Zimbabwe, Human Rights Trust of Southern Africa (SAHRIT), Human Rights Watch (HRW), International Crisis Group (ICG), Movement For Democratic Change (MDC), Physicians for Human Rights - Denmark (PHR-DK), United Kingdom (UK) Home Office, War Resisters' International (WRI).

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