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Zimbabwe: Youth militia activities, including those of the National Youth Service (NYS) and of the Green Bombers; training programs and incidents of violence since February 2009; whether youth militia target supporters of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)

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National Youth Service Program

According to the United States (US) *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2010*, the National Youth Service (NYS) Program, which was created in 2000 and suspended in 2007, provided militia training to approximately 80,000 NYS youths at more than 150 camps throughout the country (8 Apr. 2011, 60). Terence M. Mashingaidze, a contributor to the proceedings of a 2008 Africa Human Security Initiative (AHSI) conference, indicates that the NYS training centres were established in 2001 (Sept. 2010, 127). The first training centre was the Border Gezi Training Institute in Mt. Darwin; two other "infamous" ones were Guyu in the Midlands province and Mshagashe in Matabeleland South province (Mashingaidze Sept. 2010, 127). Mashingaidze argues that the NYS program was "designed to expand the [Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF)]'s power base among the youth" (*ibid.*, 131). US *Country Reports* also notes that the youths trained through this program, some of whom were "as young as 16," joined ZANU-PF affiliated youth militias (8 Apr. 2011, 61). The government used these youth militias to carry out political violence, for instance, during the 2008 election period (US 8 Apr. 2011, 61). This is further corroborated by Mashingaidze, who notes that the "ZANU-PF paramilitary youth groups" were "organized under the National Youth Training service" (Sept. 2010, 129). Graduates of the NYS Program were also employed in the government, as well as in "security structures" such as the military, police, prisons, and the intelligence services (US 8 Apr. 2011, 60-61). According to the Zim Diaspora news website, graduates of the NYS Program were given an "advantage" in a 2009 "mass recruitment exercise" carried out by the army (25 Feb. 2009). In a 28 April 2011 telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a lecturer at Midlands State University, Zimbabwe, noted that NYS members had been informally incorporated into the civil service.

Media sources report that in a document called the "National Youth Service Training Programme in Zimbabwe," the Ministry of Youth Development, Indigenization and Empowerment proposed to revive the NYS and to train approximately 300,000 youths per year (*Zimbabwe Independent* 18 Feb. 2011;

Sunday Times 15 Jan. 2011). *The Zimbabwe Independent*, a Harare-based newspaper, reports in an 18 February 2011 article that this draft document was rejected by Cabinet; the Deputy Minister reportedly said that Cabinet asked the Ministry to conduct more regional and local consultations before reintroducing the NYS.

However, sources in the Ministry told *The Zimbabwe Independent* that starting late January 2011, trainers have been deployed to all districts, and youths have been seen at the training camps "'ready for training'" (18 Feb. 2011). The Deputy Minister also noted that he had reports that there were over 100 youths at a training camp in the Mt. Darwin district, which had "terrified" villagers (*Zimbabwe Independent* 18 Feb. 2011). The Midlands State University lecturer noted the possibility that there are training camps run by ZANU-PF supporters that are not part of the NYS (28 Apr. 2011).

Green Bombers

The Green Bombers, which are also considered to be a youth militia, are referred to as such because of their green military uniforms (Human Rights Watch 11 Aug. 2008; Lecturer 28 Apr. 2011). Education International notes the existence of a "youth militia, known as 'green bombers' because of their green uniforms and notorious ruthlessness" (11 Apr. 2008). The Green Bombers are also reportedly members of the NYS (Human Rights Watch 11 Aug. 2008; BBC 13 May 2008). In an article, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) states that a Zimbabwean journalist referred to "ruling party militias ... as the 'Green Bombers'" (2 July 2008). The lecturer from Midlands State University indicates that once they had completed camp training, the NYS members continued to wear their uniforms during their activities in the community (28 Apr. 2011).

Youth Militia

The Midlands State University lecturer clarified that the terms "ZANU-PF militants, ZANU-PF militia, ZANU-PF youth militia, and ZANU-PF youths" all refer to people that are "controlled" by the ZANU-PF party (28 Apr. 2011). He also noted that some of these groups only mobilize when elections are approaching and that they do so for jobs, money, or beer (Lecturer 28 Apr. 2011). According to the lecturer, some of the youths that mobilize for the ZANU-PF are not part of the party payroll nor member of the NYS (*ibid.*). The lecturer also mentioned that the term "youth" is used very loosely in Zimbabwe and that it can include people younger than 18, as well as people of about 40 or 50 years of age (*ibid.*).

The Midlands State University lecturer notes that the militias were formed from the NYS and that youth militias work for the ZANU-PF party (28 Apr. 2011).

According to three sources, an audit revealed that some youth militia members have been paid by the government (Freedom House 2010; UN 27 Oct. 2009; Lecturer 28 Apr. 2011). This audit was reportedly conducted by the Ministry of Public Service (*ibid.*). Freedom House indicates that it took place in October 2009 (2010). Two sources specified that, according to the audit, about 10,000 ZANU-PF youth militia members were on the payroll of the youth development ministry (Freedom House 2010; UN 27 Oct. 2009). A United Nations (UN) Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) article indicates that the ZANU-PF youth militia had been employed by the government since May 2008 and were then deployed to rural areas (27 Oct. 2009). Cited in the IRIN article, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)'s spokesman said that the youth

militia

were not subjected to a medical examination, as required by the public service regulations, declarations of official secrets were not completed, and there were no staff files opened at either the ministry headquarters or provincial centers. (27 Oct. 2009)

Similarly, the lecturer also referred to the audit when he indicated that the youth militia members are "informally" paid by the government (28 Apr. 2011).

The Sunday Times, a South African newspaper published in Johannesburg, notes that "[i]n return for their services," ZANU-PF youths "have been rewarded with jobs in the civil service, including the army and police, and immunity from prosecution for their crimes" (*Sunday Times* 15 Jan. 2011). An article published by GlobalSecurity.org, a "source of background information and developing news stories in the fields of defence, space, intelligence, [weapons of mass destructions], and homeland security" (GlobalSecurity.org n.d.), cited an unnamed policeman who disclosed that the police are "no longer professional" (15 June 2009). The policeman explained that since the 2008 elections, "many untrained Zanu PF youth militia" were recruited into the police force, which resulted in "lowering the standards in the Zimbabwe Republic Police" (GlobalSecurity.org 15 June 2009).

Training Camps

The *Zimbabwe Telegraph* reports that

the mobs of violent ZANU PF youths who are causing chaos in Harare and other urban centres were trained for two months outside Harare, at the Inkomo army barracks. Leaked confidential documents allegedly show that Mugabe's regime has since November 2010 been recruiting impoverished youths from rural areas and giving them military training.

... the regime is said to be planning on training up to 70 000 youths by the end of May 2011 Recruitment has mainly been conducted in Mashonaland West, East and Central provinces ... (4 Feb. 2011)

The Standard, which is based in Harare, and is a "sister publication" of the *Zimbabwe Independent* (Zimbabwe Democracy Now n.d.), indicated on 31 October 2009 that a ZANU-PF training camp where youths are being recruited was reopened a "few kilometers" from Nyamapanda, in Mashonaland East province. ZimOnline, "Zimbabwe's independent news agency," indicated on 24 February 2010 that, according to the Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights), camps were established by armed militia in parts of Mashonaland West, Midlands and Manicaland provinces. ZimOnline also indicated in a subsequent article that, according to a report by the MDC, ZANU-PF had re-established camps for militia training (4 Oct. 2010). These camps are reportedly located at five elementary schools of Maramba Pfungwe in Mashonaland East province (ZimOnline 4 Oct. 2010).

Similarly, *The Guardian* reported on 18 April 2010 that "the pressure group Zimbabwe Democracy Now ... warned that Zanu-PF's youth militia camps have never been fully dismantled and are being re-established in areas where MDC supporters are being targeted."

According to ZimRights, "torture bases" controlled by the army and youth militia have reportedly been set up in Nyanga, Gokwe, Chegutu and Makoni (quoted in ZimOnline 24 Feb. 2010). Likewise, the Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP) reported that ZANU-PF militia has established "torture camps" in Mashonaland Central province (quoted in ZimOnline 1 Dec. 2010). ZimOnline added that "ZANU PF youths are known for using militia camps as torture basis where perceived opponents of Mugabe and his party are assaulted, raped, tortured or even murdered" (4 Oct. 2010). Corroborating information on the use of torture at youth militia training camps could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Violent activities of youth militia

According to the lecturer at Midlands State University, the organization of the ZANU-PF militias is hierarchical and centralized, with its orders issued by the central command of the party; he added that the Ministry of Youth and Employment Creation is the "coordinating and monitoring body for youth mobilization" (28 Apr. 2011).

The South African *Sunday Times* states that

[y]ouths have been used to spearhead Mugabe's violent policies, including land invasions, threatening foreign companies, price controls, coercive political mobilisation, including forcing people to buy Zanu-PF membership cards and vote for the party, and attacking opposition supporters.

They have also been enforcers of Mugabe's other repressive government policies, and used to denounce foreign governments and targeted Western sanctions on Zimbabwe. (15 Jan. 2011)

Freedom House states that "ZANU-PF militias operate as de facto enforcers of government policies and have committed assault, torture, rape, extralegal evictions, and extralegal executions without fear of punishment" (2010). According to the NGO, these abuses occurred at a lower rate in 2009 than in 2008, when their incidence had increased "significantly" (Freedom House 2010). However, a 23 January 2011 article in *The Zimbabwe Telegraph* notes that in Budiriro, Mbare and Chitungwiza, "violence has resurfaced with soldiers, police details and the youth militia descending on the people with brutality; assaulting, destroying homes and arresting perceived MDC supporters."

In their *Political Violence Report* for March 2009, the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, a non-governmental organization in Zimbabwe providing legal and social assistance to human rights abuse victims (n.d.), points out that some farmers of Chegutu and Chiredzi "have been forced to leave their homes and have had their property looted by war veterans and ZANU PF youths" (28 Apr. 2009, 3). The organization's report for April 2009 highlights that the Zimbabwe Republic Police had taken "no action" against ZANU-PF youths who had "occupied" commercial farms (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 2 June 2009, 2).

Voice of America (VOA), a US government media broadcaster (n.d.), reports that in early February 2011, "a mob of youths alleged to be militants of Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF party rampaged in Harare ... looting stores and beating passers-by" (VOA 7 Feb. 2011).

Two sources report that ZANU-PF youth militias are targeting teachers (ibid. 28 Feb. 2011; UN 27 Oct. 2009). A UN IRIN article indicates that teachers have been accused by ZANU-PF supporters of being allies of the MDC (ibid.). The UN's IRIN also reports the Secretary-General of the Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) as saying that ZANU-PF youth militia are establishing offices in Zimbabwean schools without official permission from the Ministry of Education, as well as appointing school children as informants within the schools (UN 27 July 2009). The secretary-general also said that "since the emergence of militia groups, teachers in rural areas feared for their security" (ibid.).

Movement for Democratic Change

In its *Political Violence Report* for April 2009, the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum documented three cases in which MDC supporters were "abducted and tortured" by ZANU-PF youths in Chitungwiza, Mutoko and Shamva (2 June 2009, 3). A UN IRIN article reports that in July 2009, a female MDC supporter was beaten up by a youth militia by order of her uncle, a ZANU-PF official (27 July 2009). A few days later, she was assaulted again and "left for dead" by the same youth militia (UN 27 July 2009).

In October 2009, a *Standard* article reported that, according to the MDC-Tsvangirai (MDC-T) party, the main MDC faction, attacks against MDC-T followers in rural areas have "intensified" following the "disengagement" of the MDC-T from the ZANU-PF in the coalition government (31 Oct. 2009). The MDC-T social welfare secretary was quoted in the same article as saying that ZANU-PF has "'re-activated' its terror squads and camps in the rural areas, blamed for murder, rape, plunder and general violence in last June's [2008] election" (*The Standard* 31 Oct. 2009). The article also mentions that the PTUZ secretary-general said that "youths were visiting schools taking down names of teachers suspected to be sympathetic to the MDC-T" (ibid.).

The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum reports that ZANU-PF youth militia attacked MDC supporters during a party rally in Epworth on 21 February 2010, using "a variety of weaponry" (26 Feb. 2010).

The Zimbabwean reports that, according to the MDC-T, in June and July 2010, attacks on its officials and followers "intensified" as part of the political violence used by the ZANU-PF (7 Aug. 2010). Two sources mentioned that in early August 2010, youth militia and Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) agents attacked and allegedly broke the limbs of two MDC-T officials from Chipinge in Manicaland, and, in a separate incident, vandalized an MDC vehicle (*The Zimbabwean* 7 Aug. 2010; ZimOnline 9 Aug. 2010).

ZimOnline reports that on 13 January 2011, ZANU-PF youth "caused disturbances" at the MDC headquarter in Harare, where they "attacked innocent shoppers and workers" (27 Jan. 2011). A few days later, these same youths presented the MDC-run Gokwe town council with threats of "violent evictions" if they do not step down from office (ZimOnline 27 Jan. 2011). *The Zimbabwe Telegraph* reports that in January 2011, ZANU-PF militia and uniformed soldiers attacked MDC supporters in Budiriro (23 Jan. 2011). The acts of violence included an abduction, attacks with iron bars resulting in the hospitalization of the victims, a shooting, other assaults, and the destruction of houses (*The Zimbabwe Telegraph* 23 Jan. 2011).

A UN IRIN article reports that a ZANU-PF youth militia attacked three MDC

supporters for refusing to sign a petition calling for economic sanctions imposed by the US and the European Union (EU) to be lifted (31 Jan. 2011). The victims alleged that two police officers were watching the scene while the assault took place (UN 31 Jan. 2011). The same article also notes that the MDC has publicly claimed that ZANU-PF militias in the Harare and Bulawayo suburbs have attacked "scores" of its supporters (ibid.).

The Guardian reports that, according to an independent doctors' group, on 31 January 2011, there were approximately 70 "pro-Mugabe militants [that] were trucked in to throw stones and carry out assaults" at a district MDC office in the Mbare township of Harare (3 Feb. 2011). This, claims the MDC, is among other instances of ZANU-PF youth militia "running amok" in poor townships; the party also asserted that police have refused to arrest ZANU-PF members (*The Guardian* 3 Feb. 2011).

The Zimbabwe Telegraph also reports violence by ZANU-PF youth against MDC youth in Epworth that forced the latter to leave their homes, as well as ZANU-PF youths looting and destroying the houses of MDC activists and its "suspected sympathisers" (9 Feb. 2011).

An article published on 7 March 2011 by *The Standard* reports that there is political violence throughout Zimbabwe, with the MDC stating that

facts on the ground showed that Zanu PF militias were responsible for most of the political murders, assaults and destruction of property. Police are accused of going after the victims of the violence and giving the Zanu PF youths immunity from prosecution.

The Standard reports that a rally organized on 19 March 2011 by Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, the leader of the MDC, was stopped by ZANU-PF youths who blocked off the venue where the rally was to take place and "severely beat up anyone who walked past" it (20 Mar. 2011). The MDC-T secretary-general further reported that several MDC supporters that came to the rally were "brutalized" or "kidnapped" by the militia (*The Standard* 20 Mar. 2011). SW Radio Africa, "an independent Zimbabwean radio station ... dedicated to the development of a free and independent media in Zimbabwe" (SW Radio Africa n.d.), reports the same incident (ibid. 21 Mar. 2011). The radio station also adds that about 15 people were hospitalized with "serious injuries" and that 3 individuals were abducted by the ZANU-PF in the course of this event (ibid.). According to *The Standard*, several cases of assaults against MDC activists by ZANU-PF militia occurred between February and March 2011 (20 Mar. 2011).

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.

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Oral sources: Academics from Midland State University; a professor at the University of South Africa; representatives from Justice for Children Trust; Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights; Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum; the coordinator of Nonviolent Action and Strategies for Social Change (NOVASC); and the National Director of the Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP) did not reply within the time constraints of this Response.

Internet sites, including: *Africa Confidential*; *Africa Research Bulletin*; *Africa Today*; African Human Security Initiative; AllAfrica.com; Amnesty International (AI); Center on Conscience and War; Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers; *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*; Factiva; Harare Research and Advocacy Unit; *The Herald* [Harare]; Human Rights Trust of Southern Africa (SAHRIT); Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR); *Journal of Refugee Studies*; Justice for Children Trust; Kubatana.net; Movement for Democratic Change (MDC); *NewsDay* [Harare]; Peacewomen.org; Solidarity Peace Trust; South African Institute of International Affairs; United Nations (UN) - Refworld; Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights (ZADHR); Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights); Zimbabwe — Ministry of Youth Development, Indigenization and Empowerment.

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