



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe – ZWE38518 – Returnees –
MDC – Zanu-PF – Politically motivated
violence against women

5 April 2011

1. Are all those who return to Zimbabwe from overseas considered MDC supporters or MDC spies?

Not all those who return to Zimbabwe from overseas are considered Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) supporters or spies. While information was found to suggest those returning from overseas were sometimes suspected of spying for Western states, there were conflicting views as to the extent to which this happens, and whether this would result in returnees being targeted. There is no compelling information to suggest returnees experience harm solely for having lived overseas.

According to information provided by DFAT in 2007, it is likely students returning from Western countries would only be identified upon return if they had been active in opposition organisations such as the MDC and trade unions.¹ DFAT stated they were aware that officers of the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) had been covertly posted under Immigration cover at Harare International Airport for some time. If an individual who was active in targeted organisations such as the MDC, trade unions or civil society organisations, it is possible they may be identified upon arrival at Harare International Airport. If this were the case, punitive measures would be the result of such activism, rather than for having been overseas.²

In 2008, DFAT provided information regarding a Zimbabwean national who claimed that her neighbours would assume that because she had travelled overseas and had sent her children to study overseas, she must be receiving money from the MDC. DFAT, however, assessed that the individual would not likely be targeted by her neighbours as claimed.³

A 2008 *African Executive* article claimed that Zimbabwe's policies were geared towards "countering foreign threats including the 'threats' from Zimbabweans abroad, who are seen as working against the ruling party"⁴, while the UK Asylum and Immigration Tribunal assessed in 2005 that "it was clear that Zimbabwean security services believed returning asylum seekers were British spies".⁵ According to the tribunal, "such was the political paranoia in the

¹ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report No. ZWE32420 – Zimbabwe: RRT Information Request: ZWE32420*, 23 October – Attachment 1

² Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report No. ZWE32420 – Zimbabwe: RRT Information Request: ZWE32420*, 23 October – Attachment 1

³ DIAC Country Information Service 2008, *Country Information Report No. 08/05 – Imputed Political Opinion*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 2 February 2008), 5 February – Attachment 2

⁴ Kundishora, H. 2008, 'Zimbabwe Must not Persecute its Diaspora', *The African Executive*, 11-18 June <http://www.africanexecutive.com/modules/magazine/articles.php?article=3211#> – Accessed 30 October 2009 – Attachment 3

⁵ 'Q and A: Zimbabwe asylum ruling' 2006, *BBC News*, 11 April http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4901202.stm – Accessed 4 November 2009 – Attachment 4

Robert Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe, the very act of seeking asylum in Britain, even if there were no grounds for protection, meant that a Zimbabwean could be a marked man on return.⁶ A 2005 *BBC News* article cited claims by lawyers acting for Zimbabwean asylum seekers in the United Kingdom that “Zimbabweans deported home are regarded as traitors or spies” by the Mugabe government, with authorities believing returning asylum seekers were deliberately being sent back as “agents of regime change”.⁷ The article stated that Zimbabwean authorities took a particular interest in those returning from Britain due to a perception that the British government was leading an international campaign for regime change in Zimbabwe.⁸ It is noteworthy that in March 2011, the government of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland announced that the UK Border Agency would resume deporting failed Zimbabwean asylum-seekers back to Zimbabwe, after a five year moratorium on deportations. The decision follows an Upper Tribunal of the Immigration and Asylum Chamber ruling that there was no evidence that those being returned would generally be at risk of harm.⁹

In September 2010, the UK Border Agency published a major report on the current situation in Zimbabwe, including that of returnees. Information in the report was obtained during a fact-finding mission, and is based on interviews with seven Zimbabweans who had claimed asylum in the UK and had voluntarily returned during 2009 and 2010. All had low political profiles and feared harm from Zanu-PF; none reported experiencing problems from officials upon passing through Harare airport, or on re-settling in the country.¹⁰ The returnees, however, had been cautious not to reveal they had sought asylum overseas, some from uncertainty of how people would react, others from fear of discrimination or reprisals from Zanu-PF.¹¹

2. Is it usual for authorities and Zanu PF supporters to target women who, while they have sympathies for the MDC, are not MDC members and have not attended MDC rallies?

While no specific information was found indicating ZANU-PF supporters target women sympathetic to the MDC but who are not members and have not attended rallies, the chances of non-politically active women being targeted by Zanu-PF are likely to be less than those who are politically active. However, in traditionally volatile periods, such as election campaigns and elections themselves, the distinction between politically active or otherwise is likely to blur in the eyes of ZANU-PF supporters. According to the UK Border Agency, the four main profiles of victims of violence include: MDC office bearers/polling agents during elections; known or discovered MDC members; suspected MDC members; and those linked with NGOs or Zimbabwe’s Electoral Support Network.¹² It is noteworthy that a recommended additional profile was “persons that do not demonstrate ‘positive affiliation’ to

⁶ ‘Q and A: Zimbabwe asylum ruling’ 2006, *BBC News*, 11 April http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4901202.stm - Accessed 4 November 2009 – Attachment 4

⁷ ‘Zimbabwe returnees regarded spies’ 2005, *BBC News*, 6 October http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4315122.stm – Accessed 7 September 2009 – Attachment 5

⁸ ‘Zimbabwe returnees regarded spies’ 2005, *BBC News*, 6 October http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4315122.stm – Accessed 7 September 2009 – Attachment 5

⁹ Morris, N. 2011, ‘Failed asylum-seekers face deportation back to Zimbabwe’, *The Independent*, 15 March <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/failed-asylumseekers-face-deportation-back-to-zimbabwe-2241862.html#> – Accessed 17 March 2011 – Attachment 6

¹⁰ UK Border Agency, 2010, *Report of Fact Finding Mission to Zimbabwe Harare 9 – 17 August 2010*, 21 September, pp. 6, 46-52 – Attachment 7

¹¹ UK Border Agency, 2010, *Report of Fact Finding Mission to Zimbabwe Harare 9 – 17 August 2010*, 21 September, pp. 46-52 – Attachment 7

¹² UK Border Agency, 2010, *Report of Fact Finding Mission to Zimbabwe Harare 9 – 17 August 2010*, 21 September, p. 66 – Attachment 7

Zanu-PF”, particularly in rural areas and during elections.¹³ To wit, any individual perceived not to support ZANU-PF is likely to be at some level of risk, particularly during elections.

A large body of information exists regarding politically motivated violence against women in Zimbabwe. A Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU) survey cited by the UK Border Agency revealed out of a sample of 2,200 women, over 50 per cent reported experiences of political violence, 2 per cent reported political rape, and 14 per cent knew someone who had been raped for political reasons.¹⁴ US-based AIDS advocacy group AIDS-Free World published report in 2008 which alleges female MDC supporters were targeted in a systematic rape campaign led by the ZANU-PF. The report, based on 70 sworn affidavits of survivors and witnesses, alleges that that “every victim...was involved in organizing for or supporting the Movement for Democratic Change”. Some had positions as officers of the party, but most were merely ‘active’ members who volunteered for the party, attended rallies, distributed MDC pamphlets, or wore MDC t-shirts in their communities. Sixty-seven of the women reported that the perpetrators made political statements during the rapes. The report argued that the rapes were part of a campaign “against MDC female members and supporters calculated to intimidate, humiliate, and punish them – and by extension, their families – for their political affiliation”. The attacks were seemingly condoned by authorities with “consistent refusal by police to investigate the attacks, as well as a lack of legal action by NGOs to address the rapes”.¹⁵

Several other reports found evidence of endemic politically motivated violence against women opposition supporters including rape. A December 2009 UK Home Office report adds that during the 2008 elections, rape was used as a “political weapon against opposition supporters”.¹¹ This view was echoed by Freedom House in its 2009 annual report.¹⁶ An article in the *Zimbabwean* suggests human rights groups estimate that between May and July 2008, 2000 women were raped at militia camps. The article also referred to a 2009 RAU study which told the stories of four women who were tortured for their political activities.¹⁷

¹³ UK Border Agency, 2010, *Report of Fact Finding Mission to Zimbabwe Harare 9 – 17 August 2010*, 21 September, p. 66 – Attachment 7

¹⁴ UK Border Agency, 2010, *Report of Fact Finding Mission to Zimbabwe Harare 9 – 17 August 2010*, 21 September, p. 66 – Attachment 7

¹⁵ AIDS-Free World 2009, *Electing to Rape: Sexual Terror in Mugabe’s Zimbabwe*, AIDS-Free World website, December, pp.13-14, 26-27 <http://www.aids-free-world.org/images/stories/Zimbabwe/zim%20grid%20screenversionfinal.pdf> – Accessed 4 January 2009 – Attachment 8

¹⁶ Freedom House 2009, ‘Freedom in the World Country Report: Zimbabwe’, 16 July – Attachment 9

¹⁷ ‘Politically Motivated Violence against Zimbabwean Women’ 2009, *The Zimbabwean*, 7 May – Attachment 10

Attachments

1. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report No. ZWE32420 – Zimbabwe: RRT Information Request: ZWE32420*, 23 October.
2. DIAC Country Information Service 2008, *Country Information Report No. 08/05 – Imputed Political Opinion*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 2 February 2008), 5 February.
3. Kundishora, H. 2008, 'Zimbabwe Must not Persecute its Diaspora', *The African Executive*, 11-18 June <http://www.africanexecutive.com/modules/magazine/articles.php?article=3211#> – Accessed 30 October 2009.
4. 'Q and A: Zimbabwe asylum ruling' 2006, *BBC News*, 11 April http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4901202.stm – Accessed 4 November 2009.
5. 'Zimbabwe returnees regarded spies' 2005, *BBC News*, 6 October http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4315122.stm – Accessed 7 September 2009.
6. Morris, N. 2011, 'Failed asylum-seekers face deportation back to Zimbabwe', *The Independent*, 15 March <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/failed-asylumseekers-face-deportation-back-to-zimbabwe-2241862.html#> – Accessed 17 March 2011.
7. UK Border Agency, 2010, *Report of Fact Finding Mission to Zimbabwe Harare 9 – 17 August 2010*, 21 September.
8. AIDS-Free World 2009, *Electing to Rape: Sexual Terror in Mugabe's Zimbabwe*, AIDS-Free World website, December <http://www.aids-freeworld.org/images/stories/Zimbabwe/zim%20grid%20screenversionfinal.pdf> – Accessed 4 January 2009.
9. Freedom House 2009, 'Freedom in the World Country Report: Zimbabwe', 16 July. (CISNET Zimbabwe CX230124)
10. 'Politically Motivated Violence against Zimbabwean Women' 2009, *The Zimbabwean*, 7 May. (CISNET Zimbabwe CX225889)