



Aldo Dell'Ariccia  
Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Zimbabwe

Brussels, 18 March 2011  
Our Ref: B1052

**Request for European Union support for human rights defenders in Zimbabwe**

Your Excellency,

We are deeply concerned about the recent increase in harassment, intimidation and arrests of human rights and political activists in Zimbabwe. We are troubled by reports of activists being tortured while in custody. Several human rights activists have reported being under surveillance. In an overall situation of partisan policing, the Law and Order Section of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) is the lead unit in targeting human rights defenders. With this letter, we are appealing to the EU to step up its efforts to bring about an end to the systematic harassment and intimidation of human rights activists.

We recognise that the EU is sharing “deep concerns at the upsurge in political violence seen in recent weeks”, as expressed in the Declaration by High Representative Catherine Ashton on behalf of the EU upon renewing the targeted measures against Zimbabwe on 15 February 2011. The EU also states that “further reforms are necessary with regard to the respect for rule of law, human rights and democracy, which are essential in order to create an environment conducive to the holding of credible elections.”

Such an environment must also allow for individuals and organisations to carry out their work on the promotion and protection of human rights, as outlined by the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. In line with the EU’s commitment under its own Guidelines on the issue, the EU Delegation and member state missions need to adopt a proactive policy to support and protect human rights defenders. Concrete measures are needed to help human rights and political activists affected by the current clampdown. Allegations of arrested human rights activists being tortured further reinforce the urgent need to act, in line with the EU Guidelines on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

The climate of fear and intimidation reduces the possibility of return for human rights defenders who have had to flee Zimbabwe. This is true for Gertrude Hambira, Secretary General of the General Agricultural and Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe (GAPWUZ), who was compelled to leave Zimbabwe in February 2010 owing to fears for her safety after she was the victim of repeated harassment and intimidation. In view of current developments, it is becoming increasingly difficult for Gertrude Hambira even to consider returning safely to Zimbabwe, given the risk she faces of arrest and prolonged detention.

We acknowledge the challenging circumstances in which the EU operates in Zimbabwe. However we believe that the EU can have a constructive and decisive influence over developments in the country. For this reason, we urge the EU to take every opportunity to:

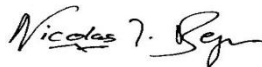
- Maintain regular contacts with human rights defenders, in particular those at risk, and demonstrate support for their activities, thereby consulting defenders about how visible EU support should be.
- Express concern about the continuing harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders
- Express concern about allegations of activists being tortured in detention, urging the authorities to conduct prompt investigations bringing the responsible security agents to justice.
- Urge the authorities to ensure that activists who remain in custody are not subject to torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, and are not detained in solitary confinement.
- Urge the authorities to guarantee all detainees access to lawyers and medical treatment, particularly those allegedly tortured in custody.
- Urge the authorities to drop any treason charges against activists arrested solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression and to immediately and unconditionally release them. Monitor any trials conducted against human rights activists.

Furthermore, we also urge the EU to support Gertrude Hambira's return to Zimbabwe, if and when she decides to do so. Such support needs to be accorded in line with the protection needs expressed by her.

We also encourage the EU to raise its concerns about the situation in Zimbabwe with representatives of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) structures, in particular with South Africa in its capacity as the facilitator of the political process in Zimbabwe, as well with Namibia as the current SADC chair. In seeking to bring about urgently needed police reforms, the EU should urge SADC to engage with the ZRP through the Southern Africa Regional Police Chiefs Coordination Organisation (SARPPCO).

We would be grateful to receive information about any action the EU takes in support of human rights defenders in Zimbabwe, and remain at your disposal to answer any questions you may have.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Nicolas J. Beger  
Director

Cc:

Alexandros Yannis, Member of Cabinet of High Representative Catherine Ashton  
Claudia Wiedey-Nippold, Head of Southern Africa Unit