



PUBLIC STATEMENT

Zimbabwe: Mission by UN Special Rapporteur on Torture blocked

Copenhagen, Geneva, London, Paris, 30 October 2009. The Coalition of International NGOs against Torture (CINAT)¹ strongly condemns Zimbabwe's refusal to receive after all the officially planned fact-finding mission to Zimbabwe by the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Mr. Manfred Nowak. Mr. Nowak's visit was postponed at the last minute by Zimbabwe's Foreign Ministry while he was on transit to the country.

Mr. Manfred Nowak was invited by the Zimbabwe Government to conduct an official fact-finding mission from 28 October to 4 November 2009. While in transit in Johannesburg on 27 October, he was informed that the Zimbabwean Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Mumbengegwi, had decided on 26 October to postpone the mission because of an unanticipated meeting with the Southern African regional group (SADC) due to take place in Harare on 29 October. The SADC meeting was to try to resolve the current political crisis. While still in Johannesburg Mr. Nowak was informed that Prime Minister Mr. Tsvangirai wished to meet him, so Mr. Nowak decided to travel to Harare for this meeting. He was stopped by immigration officials at Harare airport on 28 October. He spent the night at the airport and was sent back on the first flight to Johannesburg².

The invitation to the Special Rapporteur to visit the country had raised hopes that the Zimbabwe Government was finally disposed to address the serious human rights abuses, including acts of torture and ill-treatment that remain widespread in the country. This was all the more the case since it would have been the first visit to Zimbabwe by a UN Special Rapporteur.

The last-minute cancellation of the visit raises very serious concerns since there are growing signs that the country may slide back into the political violence seen last year. The period leading up to Zimbabwe's re-run of the Presidential elections in June 2008 and immediately thereafter was a time of great political uncertainty marked by high levels of politically motivated killings, torture and ill-treatment as well as abductions and other serious human rights violations that have still not been investigated by the competent authorities.

CINAT deeply regrets that the Special Rapporteur has been prevented from objectively assessing the situation of torture and ill-treatment in Zimbabwe, and urges the international community to strongly condemn those responsible.

¹ CINAT member organisations: Amnesty International (AI), the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT), the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), the International Federation of Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (FIACAT), the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT), the Redress Trust (REDRESS) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT).

² <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/media.aspx>

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