

Zimbabwe Police News

25 April 2008 (IRIN)

About 400 people seeking refuge from alleged state-sponsored violence at the opposition party offices of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in the capital, Harare, have been arrested by riot police, according to an IRIN correspondent.

Hundreds of people, including children, have fled to Harare from rural areas, seeking medical attention after the ZANU-PF government launched "Operation Mavhoterapapi" (Who did you vote for?) in the wake of their parliamentary election defeat and an anticipated second round of voting in the presidential ballot. A political analyst who declined to be identified, told IRIN the victims of Operation Mavhoterapapi, including those who sought refuge at the MDC offices, were being portrayed by the state media as the perpetrators of post-election violence and were likely to be charged with public violence. Hundreds of people were bundled into waiting buses outside of the MDC offices, many of them still bandaged as a result of injuries sustained during alleged assaults by soldiers and police in the rural areas, and taken to Harare's Central Police station. The political analyst said it was likely that ZANU-PF would claim the injuries of those arrested were sustained during attacks perpetrated against ZANU-PF supporters.

MDC spokesperson Nelson Chamisa told IRIN "we are talking of systematic violence being unleashed on defenceless civilians by a government determined to stay in power at all costs, and without any regard to international law and advice. They clearly want to eliminate dissenting voices."

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President Robert Mugabe's government is challenging widespread reports of systematic beatings and assaults by the army, police and ZANU-PF militia as part of a campaign dubbed "Operation Mavhoterapapi" (Who did you vote for?). The opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) claim that since the 29 March poll, in which the ruling ZANU-PF lost their majority in parliament for the first time since independence from Britain in 1980, at least 10 of their supporters have been killed and hundreds assaulted. The MDC contend that Operation Mavhoterapapi is intended to intimidate voters ahead of an expected second-round presidential ballot, which ZANU-PF claim had no clear winner, against the opposition claim that their leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, won by more than the 50 percent plus one vote required, a result that negates a second round of voting. Police spokesman and assistant commissioner Wayne Bvudzijena said no formal complaints of abuse by the security forces and ruling party militants had been received. "It is unfortunate that these reports of political violence are only surfacing on the internet, with no formal reports being made. We respond to information supplied to us by the public and we have nothing to hide."

IRIN interviewed several MDC supporters who were hospitalised after attacks by people they said were either members of the army, police or ZANU-PF militia, otherwise known as war veterans. Most were too afraid to be identified and said that during their beatings they were warned not to speak to the media or report the

attacks to the police.

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