

## **Zimbabwe Police News**

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Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), whose 55,000 membership is comprised of women aged between 16 and 73, mainly in low-income employment, released its interim report after the 14-member Southern African Development Community (SADC) expressed confidence in Zimbabwe's progress towards free and fair elections at its summit in August. "WOZA members do not have the protection of the law and peaceful protest is met with brutal force," said the preliminary Report on Political Violence Against Members of Women of Zimbabwe Arise, compiled from a random sample of 15 percent (397 women) of the 2,200 interviews conducted with its members. The interim report found that "WOZA members have suffered extreme abuse perpetrated by state actors", with 75 percent subjected to humiliating and degrading treatment, 50 percent suffering assaults and psychological torture, and 40 percent subjected to physical torture. Half of those surveyed were detained longer than the statutory limit of 48 hours, while about a quarter of the sample group had sustained injuries requiring medical treatment. "The women endured various forms of torture, including beatings with a variety of instruments, e.g. baton sticks, booted feet, wooden planks, being slapped, and falanga [beatings on the bottom of the feet]. Some violations occurred in the street during arrest, whilst others took place in police vehicles and/or in police custody," the report said. "An angry and increasingly desperate population is consistently prevented from voicing their complaints. All Zimbabweans are victims of economic and social collapse, but those that dare to protest are targeted for police brutality," the report alleged. WOZA activists are routinely addressed as "whores" by the police; mothers, who often take their babies to protests because they cannot afford to pay caregivers, has resulted in babies being detained by the police along with their mothers. "Some of the women are subjected to cruel and inhuman and degrading treatment together with their children, as the police do not separate the mothers and their children when they suffer this treatment," the report said. The abuse of the women appears to be sanctioned by high-ranking police officers. "It is WOZA's experience that on most occasions the [police] riot squad assault members on instruction from their superiors, and it is often not random violence perpetrated by individual officers," the report alleged. According to the survey, seven percent of women reported that police had been transferred from their duty stations "as punishment for failing to mistreat the women", although WOZA cautioned that this was an "assumption" made by the interviewees and had not been independently verified. Women had suffered various injuries from beatings meted out by the security services, from broken bones to deep-tissue bruising. "Of the women that were assaulted and subjected to torture, 105 (26 percent) of the sample group reported that they had sought medical treatment. Twenty of these were admitted to hospital for the beatings they received from state agents," the report said.