



ZIMBABWE POLICE TREAT DOCTORS, LAWYERS WITH CONTEMPT



Chairperson of Zimbabwe's National Constitutional Assembly, Dr Lovemore Madhuku, nurses his injuries.

The police barring of doctors from the detained and badly injured Zimbabwe opposition leaders and some 20 of their supporters in defiance of a court order last month led to the aggravation of several of their injuries, the Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights (ZADHR) claims.

Dr Douglas Gwatidzo, chairman of the ZADHR, who treated several of the MDC executive, outlined the full extent of their injuries to Izindaba, and said he believed 'this is a warning sign that we may have to brace ourselves for more'.

Describing the barring as a 'wilful act', the doctors said police denied them access on the day of the protest and arrests (Sunday, 11 March) and again the following evening when a court order was obtained. They were finally able to assess and treat the victims, some in intense pain and many of whose injuries

had become infected, only two days after the beatings.

Those injured included Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) leader Morgan Tsvangirai, national constitutional assembly chairperson, Dr Lovemore Madhuku and some 18 others, all of whom were promptly admitted to hospital. Tsvangirai, Madhuku and several others suffered head and facial injuries, severe bruising and broken bones and were recovering in hospital at the time of writing. They were among 64 people injured by baton- and gun-wielding police who clashed with thousands of people gathered or converging on the historic Zimbabwe Ground in the Harare suburb of Highfield. The prayer meeting was widely billed as 'Save Zimbabwe' and was to be led by a cross-section of local religious leaders.

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Injuries 'brutal and extensive'

Tsvangirai suffered a 10 cm long laceration to his scalp, severe swelling on the right side of his head and face, bruising and a subconjunctival haemorrhage around and in his right eye, multiple and extensive bruising on his back and buttocks, fractures of his fifth metacarpal bone and another in his wrist plus bruising on his side and on the front of both legs and just above his knee caps.

Another patient, Sekai Holland, MDC Secretary for International Relations, had multiple bruising to her face and scalp and extensive bruises extending from her neck along her entire back to her buttocks and upper back thighs. Her

left ulna was fractured while her left leg was bruised and had begun blistering, indicating sepsis. She also had a fracture of the lower end of the left fibula. The sepsis was a 'classic sign' of the exacerbation of an injury due to a delay in access to medical care. The deep soft tissue around the fractures in her left leg and ankle had become infected and she had required a surgical fixation of the ankle. Her emotional trauma was so severe that she reported not sleeping at all on her first night in hospital.

Charges would be laid against their country's Commissioner of Police, Minister of Home Affairs and the Machipisa police station commander, staff and riot police.

Gwatidzo said several other victims had also required surgery.

Andrew Makoni, one of 10 lawyers since appointed by Zimbabwe's Lawyers for Human Rights to protect those arrested and/or assaulted, said charges would be laid against their country's Commissioner of Police, Minister of Home Affairs and the Machipisa police station commander, staff and riot police. Those assailants who could be identified and their immediate commanders would also be charged in their individual capacities, he added.

Makoni said several of his clients were allegedly told to lie on their stomachs and were assaulted with fists and batons at the police station. Tsvangirai was repeatedly slammed into a wall, losing consciousness three times. Several people said their assailants were dressed in riot gear.

Clarifying what sparked the initial clash between police and protesters,



Makoni said Madhuku and a handful of other political and civic leaders were stopped and arrested by police en route to the Zimbabwe Ground prayer meeting.

Protest venue 'deeply symbolic'

The venue has deep political symbolism because it was where Mugabe gave his first post-independence freedom speech to rapturous applause in 1980 just prior to the country's first democratic elections.

In events strikingly similar to the repetitive cycle of violence in the dying days of apartheid, Makoni said further unrest ensued over the following two days as police repeatedly tried to disrupt attempts to hold a funeral for Gift Tandare, citing the draconian Public Order and Security Act.

Makoni said Tsvangirai and others were arrested subsequently when they went to the Machipisa police station to enquire after their missing colleagues. News of the arrests had spread like wildfire and fuelled resistance to subsequent riot police attempts to tell people to go home because the meeting had 'been cancelled'. Police used teargas, water cannon and batons to disperse angry crowds that were still resolutely converging on the prayer meeting. People retaliated with stones and in at least one case, a petrol bomb. One protestor, identified later as Gift Tandare, was shot dead.

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Mused a terse Makoni: 'This is certainly not the kind of thing we expected to happen after we won independence'. He said none of his clients had been formally charged at the time of writing in spite of having been taken to court by police. 'Basically they didn't have any documentation to put our clients on remand, so they were released,' he said.

Classic police brutality injuries

Two of those injured at the Tandare funeral suffered gunshot wounds that doctors claimed could require the amputation of an arm and a foot respectively. The ZADHR says all the injuries documented were consistent with beatings with blunt objects heavy enough to cause the following:

- Head injuries to three individuals, Nelson Chamisa, Morgan Tsvangirai and Lovemore Madhuku, with the latter two sustaining deep lacerations to the scalp.

- A possibly ruptured bowel in one individual due to severe blunt trauma to the abdomen.

- Dixon Magondo sustained a shattered left ankle from a gunshot wound and was likely to require amputation from the left ankle down. Another sustained shrapnel wounds early on Monday 12 March but was shot again in the same arm that evening upon his return to the funeral. This resulted in an open fracture, the severity of which may warrant amputation.



Zimbabwe civilian Grace Kwinjeh's left leg and buttock.

- Fractures to hands, arms and legs in 5 individuals including Madhuku with a fractured ulna.

- Three of these, Elton Mangoma, Sekai Holland and Morgan Tsvangirai, sustained multiple fractures.

- There were also severe, extensive and multiple soft-tissue injuries to the backs, shoulders, arms, buttocks and thighs of 14 individuals.

- A split right ear lobe sustained by Grace Kwinjeh.

MDC leader needed blood transfusion

The ZADHR said the delays in receiving medical treatment led to Tsvangirai suffering a severe haemorrhage that led to anaemia and required a blood transfusion.



MDC Secretary for International Relations, Sekai Holland allowed these pictures to be taken as evidence of her beatings by Zimbabwean police.

An unidentified detainee with hypertension had suffered an angina because of the delay in accessing treatment and the poor conditions in detention resulted in severe diarrhoea in another victim.

Sources who claimed to have seen the assaults on Tsvangirai in custody said police had taken turns to lift him and smash him against the wall. He had fainted three times but they had continued to assault him. The MDC said Tsvangirai's wife Susan was allowed to see him in the Harare jail the day after his arrest. She had reported that he was heavily bandaged and that some of the wounds had been stitched.

Tsvangirai's lawyer, Innocent Changonda, who accompanied her to the jail, said he was in 'very bad shape' and could hardly eat or speak. Makoni told *Izindaba* that Tsvangirai had complained to him of severe pain in both hands, indicating further possible fractures.

Makoni said 7 people, some of whom had suffered gunshot wounds, were still in police custody on 15 March. He knew of another 10 who were released after paying admission of guilt fines on charges of 'conduct likely to breach the peace'.

In the police version of events, spokesperson Wayne Bvudzijena alleged that people at the prayer rally tried to use children as 'human shields'. Putting the clashes into perspective, Dr Gwatidzo told *Izindaba* that the 2000 parliamentary elections and the 2003 presidential elections in Zimbabwe 'were much worse, with many more fatalities'.

Australia does some straight talking

The police brutality and defiance of the court led to unprecedented international condemnation of Mugabe's regime, a rare call from the South African government for Zimbabwe to show 'respect for the rule of law', and

skittishness among countries concerned for the safety of their citizens in Zimbabwe.

The South African government's passivity in the face of its pivotal ability to influence change was confronted head-on by Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer in a 15 March interview with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Downer said South Africa's lack of active engagement with Zimbabwe while events there 'turned from awful to catastrophic' had directly led to a 'downturn in relations' between his country and South Africa.

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Inflation in Zimbabwe is currently running at over 1 600%. An estimated 80% of the population is jobless and living below the poverty line with the country reportedly having reached the lowest life expectancy in the world. At the time of writing President Robert Mugabe vowed to proceed with presidential elections next year, then stand again and rule till 2014. He would then be 91 and would have spent 34 years in power.

Chris Bateman