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**Breaking the Silence on Political Violence in Zimbabwe**

U.S. Ambassador McGee condemns Zimbabwe atrocities

The following letter by James D. McGee, U.S. ambassador to Zimbabwe, was issued May 8 and is in the public domain. There are no republication restrictions.

(begin byliner)

Breaking the Silence on Political Violence In Zimbabwe  
By James D. McGee  
May 8, 2008

I feel compelled, as a supporter of human rights, to speak out about the atrocities being committed across Zimbabwe. Whatever one believes about the questionable poll results finally announced by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and the controversy over a run-off, the real story in Zimbabwe now is the violence being directed against average citizens for exercising their right to vote.

On March 29, a majority of Zimbabweans voted for change. There is no doubting that. Even the ZEC's figures admit it. Equally undeniable is that some within ZANU-PF have started a systematic campaign of violence designed to block this vote for change. The U.S. Government has concrete evidence of destruction of homes, beatings, intimidation, and even murder. We have shared this evidence with the UN and regional leaders.

So far the U.S. Government has received confirmed reports of over 700 incidents of violence resulting in over 200 people taken to hospital. At least 20 have been killed. For example, an MDC ward chairman was taken from his home in Epworth on April 26 by a group of soldiers who beat him with clubs and guns before leaving him at a police station where he was detained all day and made to pay a fine.

Two days later, on April 28, a shopkeeper in Mutoko who supported the MDC was beaten by 30 ZANU-PF members. The same gang returned to his home the next day where they stole a goat and burnt down his house. The same day an unemployed elderly man was taken in Dzvarasekwa. Along with several others, he was taken by ZANU supporters to a base where they were beaten on the feet and back. After a full day of torture they were made to pay fines and told to not vote for the MDC, or they would be beaten again.

These examples are just a few of the hundreds of confirmed reports from around the country. Taken together they paint a deeply disturbing picture of an organized campaign of violence against those who voted for the opposition.

The Zimbabwe government may attempt to claim that the MDC instigated the campaign of violence or is equally culpable. This is simply not the case. I and members of my Embassy have spoken to numerous victims and examined reports describing the violence. The inescapable conclusion is violence has been orchestrated at the highest levels of the ruling party, both to punish people for supporting the opposition in the March 29 election and to discourage support for the opposition in the event of a run-off election.

The violence cannot be allowed to continue. I will continue to speak out clearly and forcefully to demand its end. I know that SADC and other regional leaders are also concerned and I hope they will use their best efforts to stop the senseless brutality which affects Zimbabwe, the region, and most importantly ordinary people.

Until the violence stops, we will continue to work with local and international partners to help care for the wounded, feed the hungry and house the homeless.

Let me also be clear that the U.S. is aware of the identities of many of those

responsible for instigating the violence and for carrying it out. We will continue to gather evidence of the atrocities being committed so that the guilty can one day be brought to justice.

[James D. McGee is U.S. Ambassador to Zimbabwe.]

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