



W/O 3/93

Campaigners for Human Rights

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Press Statement by ZimRights to Commemorate the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances August 30, 2025

On this International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, observed annually on August 30 since its establishment by the UN General Assembly in 2010, ZimRights stands with families affected by the unlawful abduction or detention of loved ones, often by state actors, in violation of their rights. Defined by the 1992 UN Declaration and 2011 Convention, these acts remain a global crisis. In Zimbabwe, cases like the Gukurahundi atrocities and the 2015 abduction of activist Itai Dzamara highlight the urgent need for justice and accountability.

The UN Convention on Enforced Disappearances, effective since 2011, combats this international crime, which may qualify as crimes against humanity prosecutable by the ICC, affecting not only the disappearance but also their families and communities trapped in limbo. Zimbabwe, neither a signatory nor adherent to this convention, also violates the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights by failing to protect citizens from arbitrary arrest and disappearance. Nationally, the Zimbabwean government's failure to provide an effective legal framework to criminalize enforced disappearances and, the lack of accountability for past crimes, fosters impunity, normalizes enforced disappearances, and emboldens perpetrators, leaving victims and their families without justice.

Zimbabwe has grappled with enforced disappearances before and after independence. During the 1980s Gukurahundi atrocities, thousands in Matabeleland were abducted and killed, with families left in anguish and the truth suppressed. A report by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, estimates that 20 000 people were allegedly abducted, tortured or forced off their land. Later, the fast-track land reform period saw targeted intimidation, including abductions of those challenging state narratives. The 2008 post-election violence further entrenched a culture of fear, with opposition supporters disappearing amid political repression.

In more recent years, human rights activists and journalists have not been spared. High-profile cases include Itai Dzamara, a father and activist, who was abducted in 2015 for dissent, leaving his family in anguish and without answers for over a decade. Jestina Mukoko, an activist, was kidnapped in 2008 for her work as a human rights activist. Takudzwa Ngadziore, Tatenda Mombeyara, Joanna Mamombe, Tawanda Muchehiwa, and Tapfumaneyi Masaya are some of the recent victims of this heinous crime. These disappearances are not just personal tragedies but attacks on democracy, accountability, and Zimbabweans' fundamental rights, demanding urgent justice and transparency. Once a colonial tactic, this method is, worrisomely, still being used to silence dissent, and with impunity - perpetuating a cycle of fear and suffering.

As Zimbabwe's leading human rights organization, ZimRights champions justice for victims of enforced disappearances by documenting cases, amplifying their stories globally, and providing psychosocial support to the families of the victims. We have also been consistently calling for the government to ratify all conventions that safeguard human dignity.

Registered as a Welfare Organization in Zimbabwe. W/O 3/93

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Call to Action

ZimRights demands urgent action:

1. Zimbabwe must ratify the UN Convention on Enforced Disappearances to meet global human rights standards.
2. Criminalize enforced disappearances and end impunity.
3. Provide victims' families with psychological, legal, and financial support to heal from trauma.
4. Journalists must amplify the stories of the disappearance.
5. Citizens must relentlessly engage leaders to demand accountability.
6. The African Union and global community must hold Zimbabwe accountable for human rights failures.

On this day, we honor the disappeared and stand with their families, fueled by hope and resilience, confident that our united fight will secure justice and dignity for all Zimbabweans.

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