TO ALL EI MEMBER ORGANISATIONS
TO THE ITUC
TO THE ILO

Brussels, 15 May 2008

URGENT ACTION APPEAL – ZIMBABWE

Beatings of teachers and arrests of trade unionists

Dear colleagues,

Education International has been informed, by reliable and diverse sources, of a pattern of violence targeting teachers and trade unionists in the aftermath of the 29 March presidential election in Zimbabwe. EI strongly condemns these attacks and supports the resolution adopted by its affiliate, the Zimbabwe Teachers Association (ZIMTA) condemning the violence affecting teachers and asking protection for affected teachers to make sure there is no disruption of teaching and learning programmes.

As you know, the wait for the March 29 election result has led to a tense standoff and the Zimbabwean authorities have delayed the country's run-off presidential election until as late as end June.

The post election tension is unfolding into a pattern of violence mainly targeting rural communities and human and trade union rights activists. Teachers are accused of trying to influence the vote of their communities in favour of the opposition.

EI is concerned by the political violence targeting teachers, students and education communities allegedly perpetrated by security forces, youth militias, war veterans and gangs of supporters of both the ruling ZANU-PF party of President Mugabe and the opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

EI has received detailed reports from the Progressive Teachers’ Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ), which has applied for membership with EI, that so far at least 250 schools in 23 districts throughout the country have been affected by some forms of violence in the period between 3 and 9 May 2008. Hate against teachers is being propagated and according to PTUZ, in some instances teachers have been beaten in front of pupils and community members. Sixty seven teachers have been hospitalised in Harare, Kotwa, Karoi, Rusape, Bonda, Howard, Guruve, Marondera and other clinics; 139 teachers had to flee their schools; 213 teachers' houses have been looted. An undisclosed number of teachers have fled into neighbouring countries and are likely not to return.

Documenting the evidence is very difficult. Collecting testimonies over the phone has proved difficult as respondents are not always free to discuss their ordeals and the unions have limited capacity to travel to the countryside. However, facts continue to be collected and EI will keep its member organisations updated.

Arrests of trade unionists

In addition, EI has also been informed of the arrest of Raymond Majongwe, the General Secretary of PTUZ, on 15 May 2008. Mr Majongwe was picked-up by the police at the High Court of Zimbabwe where he was attending a hearing in which leaders of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) are accused of inciting people during their May Day celebrations to rise against the government.

EI notes with great concern that these facts occur in the context of organised intimidation and brutality against human rights defenders and political opponents.

What can you do?

Your organisation is invited to condemn these blatant violations of basic human and trade union rights and to urge the authorities of Zimbabwe to ensure, in all circumstances, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as the physical integrity of all citizens, in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by Zimbabwe.
As a national teacher union, EI invites you to write to the authorities of Zimbabwe. The letters should be addressed to the President and Government of Zimbabwe and to the Permanent Representative of Zimbabwe to the United Nations (addresses below), as well as to the Zimbabwe embassy in your country. A copy of your letter should also be forwarded to EI for our records.

In your letter, please urge the Zimbabwe authorities to:

i. Put an end to all acts of harassment against teachers, trade unionists and all human rights defenders in Zimbabwe;

ii. Guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of teachers and trade unionists;

iii. Conform with the provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders especially its article 1, which states that "everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels" and article 12.2, which provides that "the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration";

iv. Ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by Zimbabwe.

Addresses • President of Zimbabwe, Mr. Robert G. Mugabe, Office of the President, Private Bag 7700, Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe, Fax +263 4 708 211 • Mr. Kembo Mohadi, Minister of Home Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs, 11th Floor Mukwati Building, Private Bag 7703, Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe, Fax +263 4 726 716 • Office of the Ombudsman Fax +263 4 70 41 19 • Ambassador Mr. Chitsaka Chipaziwa, Permanent Mission of Zimbabwe to the United Nations in Geneva, Chemin William Barbey 27, 1292 Chambésy, Switzerland, Fax +41 22 758 30 44, Email: mission.zimbabwe@ties.itu.net • Ambassador Mr. Punungwe, Embassy of Zimbabwe in Brussels, 11 sq Josephine Charlotte, B-1200 Woluwe-Saint-Lambert, Fax +32 2 762 96 05, Email: zimbrussels@skynet.be

What is EI doing?

EI has sent protest letters to the Government of Zimbabwe condemning these blatant violations of basic human and trade union rights. EI is in daily contact with its affiliates in the country (mostly ZIMTA) and with PTUZ. EI has taken initiatives to support the teachers in their daily lives. EI has informed the UN agencies of the violence committed against teachers. EI is also considering sending a mission to Zimbabwe to assess how best to support the teaching community in Zimbabwe.

In June, the human and trade union rights violations perpetrated in Zimbabwe will be discussed at the International Labour Conference. EI, together with the Workers’ Group, will highlight the harassment of trade unionists and of teachers.

EI will of course keep you updated on all developments. For additional information or to discuss possible action, contact the EI Human and Trade Union Rights Coordinator by phone or email: dominique.marlet@ei-ie.org

I thank you in advance for your support of the teachers in Zimbabwe.

Yours sincerely,

Fred van Leeuwen
General Secretary