

Annual report for the International Liaison Office of the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum for 2002.

Summary.

The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (the Forum), which is a cooperation of 13 human rights organisations¹ in Zimbabwe, in late 2001 found it necessary to establish an office outside the country.

There were three main reasons for this;

- Firstly, the pressure on the Forum and its member organisations from the State machinery, including the state owned press, had been increasing;
- Secondly, there was need for a secure place for the Forum's documentation;
- Thirdly, lobbying for human rights at national level was becoming increasingly difficult.

With the help of one member organisation, Amani Trust, and two international NGO partners, Redress and Article 19, the International Liaison Office (originally called the London Liaison Office) started operations in January 2002. A coordinator was hired, who established the office at Lancaster House in Islington in London in February 2002.

This is the report of the first year of operations of this office, January to December 2002.

The International Liaison Office (IntLO) of the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum has in its opening year had reasonable success.

IntLO's main task is distributing all reports from the Forum and its member organisations internationally to relevant and interested decision makers, journalists and NGOs on all levels. During the year 17 mailings were sent to interested parties. At the end of the year, more than 400 people were receiving regular information from the office by e-mail. This list includes decision makers, journalists and NGO leaders from all over the world except Zimbabwe², though the majority are from European and Southern African countries. The list includes a number of Zimbabweans in exile, who wants to be updated on the human rights situation in their home country.

Politicians and the press, when writing about Zimbabwe, now regularly refer to the reports of the Forum. Particularly the figures from the monthly political violence reports are widely used.

The increased knowledge about the Forum and its member organisations internationally has led to an increasing number of requests for the Forum to contribute to and/or participate in international and national meetings outside of Zimbabwe.

¹ As of 31.12.02. Find a list of these member organisations as attachment 1.

² Persons from within Zimbabwe subscribe to the Forum's statements through the headquarters in Harare; research@hrforum.co.zw.

IntLO organised two major events in Europe during 2002. One in connection with the UN Day in Support of Torture Victims, 26 June, at the Law Society in London, and one in connection with the UN Day for Elimination of Violence against Women, 25 November, in the European Parliament in Brussels. These events have been made possible through cooperation with international and national NGOs. The London event was very successful with broad participation and wide media coverage. The Brussels event was less successful, mainly due to the cancellation of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) and EU countries (JPA), which should have taken place simultaneously.

In addition to the above mentioned areas of work, IntLO's main activity has been to secure a description of the human rights situation in Zimbabwe internationally, through Forum input and/or participation in relevant international events and meetings.

The Forum has focussed on the following four international bodies:

The EU: The EU introduced limited sanctions against Zimbabwe in February. The European Parliament made a number of critical statements on the situation in Zimbabwe throughout the year. The Joint Parliamentary Assembly of ACP and EU made a statement on the situation in Zimbabwe at its meeting in Cape Town, South Africa in March.

The Commonwealth: Zimbabwe has remained an issue on the agenda of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group the whole of the year (since December 2001). The Commonwealth made a decision to suspend Zimbabwe from its councils in March, following the Commonwealth Observer Group report on the presidential elections.

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR): The ACHPR for the first time sent a mission to Zimbabwe to investigate human rights violations in June. This followed the submission of a Communication by the Forum to the ACHPR on torture and organised violence in the country in the beginning of the year. This Communication is the first the ACHPR will consider on Zimbabwe.

The UN: The work with the UN has been more disappointing. Even though many of the human rights mechanisms of the UN have included cases from Zimbabwe in their reports, a proposal to adopt a resolution condemning the Zimbabwean government's human rights record at the UN Human Rights Commission's 58th Session in Geneva in April was blocked by a no action vote.

In addition to these international bodies a number of individual countries also introduced some kind of sanctions against the country and/or issued statements on the deteriorating human rights situation in the country.

All of the main international human rights NGOs have made statements condemning the human rights violations in Zimbabwe.

LONDON / HARARE
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1.0 Background for establishment of the office.

The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (the Forum) has been in existence since January 1998 when nine NGOs working in the field of human rights joined together to provide legal and psychosocial assistance to the victims of the food riots of January 1998.

Since 2000 it has been increasingly difficult to do human rights work in the country, with an escalation in the human rights violations, which has included attacks on NGOs and human rights defenders by government representatives and their supporters.

The Forum has since 1998 documented the human rights violations in the country, and publicised a number of analytical reports in addition to statements and periodical updates on the human rights situation in general and related to organised violence and torture in particular.

Increased suppression by the regime on its opponents led to a sharp increase in the human rights violations, which in turn increased the reporting by the Forum. The need to secure this documentation was a major consideration when deciding that an external office would be useful. An additional consideration was the prospect of NGO legislation that would reduce or stop the Forum's ability to operate. Preparation of such legislation was instrumental in deciding that it would be useful for the Forum to have an external office.

Lastly, The Forum found that the Zimbabwean government responded more and more aggressively towards reporting on its human rights record. The Government internationally had success in trying to portray the situation in Zimbabwe as one linked to land and race, when the documentation from the Forum showed human rights violations are mainly linked to governance and the bulk of the violations are against black Zimbabweans. In spite of the numerous recommendations that were made in the Forum reports, the situation kept deteriorating. It was therefore decided to increase the emphasis on ensuring that the international community was kept updated on events in the country. International lobbying was seen as more important in this situation, to strengthen the existing national lobbying. At the same time the Forum had to recognise that international lobbying from Harare was difficult with increasing pressure on the Forum's headquarters.

For all these purposes an office outside the country seemed useful.

The initially proposed focus of the lobbying from this office was to target two main Inter Governmental Organisations (IGOs); the Commonwealth and the EU, in addition to international NGOs. Since the Secretariat of the Commonwealth, as well as the headquarters of a majority of the international NGOs are in London, it was decided to establish the office there.

The Amani Trust used its influence in the donor community to secure funding for an International Office for the Forum. The then chair of the Forum / Director of Amani Trust Tony Reeler in December 2001 approached a London based, former Amnesty International Zimbabwe researcher and asked him to assist in establishing an office there.

2.0 The establishment of the office and initial definition of working areas.

Redress, a London based NGO working in the field of redress for torture victims, agreed to administer funds for the Forum. Article 19, another London based NGO provided office space from where the Forum could operate. Article 19's offices are locked and they control who is accessing it. It also provides safe locked space for our documentation, and was as such seen as suitable by the Forum. By early February the Forum's International Liaison Office (IntLO) was operating and the coordinator went to Zimbabwe to get a brief on how the board and its members wanted the IntLO to function.

The original brief of IntLO was to do lobby work with international NGOs and IGOs, particularly targeting the EU and the Commonwealth.

During February and March both the EU and the Commonwealth introduced limited sanctions against Zimbabwe and deemed the presidential elections unfair. Both organs strongly highlighted the human rights aspect of the situation in Zimbabwe.

The lobbying efforts of the Forum/IntLO towards these organs therefore seemed less necessary and thereafter focussed mainly on keeping contacts with relevant persons in these bodies and keeping them informed.

The ambitions of the Forum were therefore widened to look at other international bodies as well.

The chair of the Forum and the coordinator of the IntLO were invited to observe the annual (58th) session of the UN Human Rights Commission in March/April, by a US based NGO; Freedom House. After this visit, the Forum decided to extend IntLO's brief to cover the UN.

It was further decided that it was important to follow up the work that was done on the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), particularly the Communication on the use of torture in Zimbabwe that was produced by the Forum's Legal Unit late in 2001. In May the chair of the Forum, as well as representatives from two of the member organisations and the coordinator of IntLO participated in the 31st session of the ACHPR in Pretoria.

3.0 Activities by the International Liaison Office

3.1 General information work

The main work of the IntLO is to inform the international public, media and decision makers on the human rights situation in Zimbabwe. The main tool used is sending out the reports and statements of the Forum's Research Unit and Board in Harare and statements and reports of its 13 member organisations³.

³ As of 31.12.02. Find a list of these member organisations as attachment 1.

IntLO has also sent out other reports and statements from international bodies and organisations that are relevant to the human rights situation in Zimbabwe.

Reports have mainly been sent out by e-mail. The IntLO has gradually built up a list of contacts. By the end of the year more than 400 persons were receiving our e-mails.

The office sent out 17 emails during the year with reports from the Forum and/or its member organisations and other relevant reports.

In addition to emails the IntLO has followed up the main NGO partners by phone calls and meetings to coordinate the activities and exchange information about plans and trends. These informal meetings with many different partners are time consuming and consideration is being made about organising regular meetings for all main partners simultaneously.

There was a steady increase in the use of the Forum's reports by media and politicians during the year. The figures in the monthly political violence reports are regularly referred to by both politicians and media. By the end of the year the office was regularly contacted by NGOs, media and politicians seeking information about the human rights situation, as well as contacts for future visits to the country. IntLO often refers to the web page www.hrforumzim.com, which has also seen an increasing number of hits. The number of hits varies with the events in the country, with increases around elections or other events, so it is clear that the knowledge of the web page is increasing.

The situation in Zimbabwe has led to decisions not to use the press as actively as originally anticipated. Some obvious media possibilities have not been used, because of fear of retributions in Zimbabwe. Also, presswork by the IntLO could probably have been more effective if it was staffed by a Zimbabwean.

3.2 Organising of events.

During the year the International Liaison Office organised two major events to highlight the human rights situation in Zimbabwe. These were both in cooperation with local and international NGOs in the countries they were held.

3.2.1 26 June activity

The International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) has, since the UN introduced 26 June as the "International Day in Support of Torture Victims" on 12 December 1997, every year initiated activities on this day all over the world. IRCT, through Redress, approached the IntLO in April and asked if it was willing to host activities this day in London. Simultaneously the Forum was approached in Harare through one of the member organisations, Amani Trust, about hosting activities in Harare. The Forum decided to have activities both in Harare and in London.

IntLO in cooperation with Amnesty International, International Bar Association, IRCT and FIDH, held a major event at the Law Society of England and Wales.

The Chairperson of the Forum, Mr. Albert Musarurwa (Director, Legal Resources Foundation) and a board member Mr. Tony Reeler (Director, Amani Trust) were brought from Zimbabwe to speak about the chosen theme of the day, “Torture and the International Criminal Court – with a focus on Zimbabwe”. Additional speakers were: Mr. Patson Muzuwa, a Zimbabwean torture victim who is now a refugee in Britain, as well as a number of prominent UK speakers, including Mr. Michael Birnbaum, QC, Ms. Lucy Winskell, chair of the Law Society, Mr. Michael Ellman, board member of the FIDH and Mr. Steven Powles of the Human Rights Committee of the Bar Association.

The event was very well attended with the biggest hall in the Law Society packed to the extent that some people had to stand. Particularly pleasing for the organiser was to see that the event attracted many exiled Zimbabweans. The event also received considerable media coverage, particularly the Zimbabwe media based in Europe.

3.2.2 25 November activity

On 17 December 1999 the UN introduced 25 November as the “International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women”. Since the day this year coincided with the dates set for the Joint Parliamentary Assembly of the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries (the JPA), which the Forum had decided to target, it was decided to hold a lobby meeting on Zimbabwe in the EU parliament on this day. The IntLO also wanted to show a video on the use of rape as a political tool in Zimbabwe that had been shown in an Amnesty International workshop.

The head of the Forum’s Research Unit Ms. Primrose Mutambanadzo and a prominent Zimbabwean human rights lawyer Ms. Beatrice Mtetwa were brought from Zimbabwe to speak on the current situation. In addition Mr. Alan Deletroz, Vice President of the International Crisis Group spoke.

The JPA was cancelled due to conflict on whether or not to let the Zimbabwean delegates to the JPA, who are on the EU sanctions list, attend. Most of the ACP delegates never entered the European Parliament, in which the event was organised. The event was therefore only attracting Europeans, which was disappointing. Around 40 persons attended, including NGO representatives, journalists and politicians, including several Members of the European Parliament.

3.3 Organising of visits.

3.3.1 Facilitating visits by Zimbabweans to Europe

During 2002 the IntLO helped organise visits by 11 representatives from Zimbabwe to Europe.

From the Forum Secretariat, the Director, the former and present chairpersons of the board, as well as the acting and the substantive Head of the Legal Unit and the Head of the Research Unit have visited the offices of IntLO and had assistance with their programs UK or other parts of Europe from IntLO.

Also the board members / Directors of 4 member organisations (Amani Trust, GALZ, LRF and ZLHR) were assisted when visiting Europe, as well as other representatives of Amani Trust, ZimRights and ZLHR.

The office set up meetings with politicians, press, NGOs as well as staff of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Commonwealth Secretariat in London. Meetings with UN staff, IGO representatives and NGO representatives were organised in Geneva. In Brussels meetings with EU politicians, press and NGO representatives were organised. Representatives were been used to address meetings of Zimbabweans in the Diaspora.

3.3.2 Visits by the International Liaison Office to Zimbabwe

The IntLO coordinator visited Zimbabwe 4 times during the year. Each visit was scheduled to coincide with a board meeting to ensure that the IntLO coordinator participated in board meetings, to be given instruction by the board and to give the board a chance to feed back to the coordinator on IntLO's work.

Each visit should ideally also include a visit one part of Zimbabwe in addition to Harare in order to get a more holistic understanding of the situation in the country and the work of member organisations outside the capital.

The February-March visit included visits to Mashonaland East, made possible through the coordinator's participation in the Norwegian election observation team. The May visit coincided with the ACHPR session in Pretoria and the July visit was combined with participation in an NGO meeting in connection with the African Union Summit in Durban and therefore did not have time for any outside province to be visited. The September visit included a visit to Manicaland, which coincided with the rural district council elections.

On every visit the coordinator visited as many of the member organisations as possible in order to inform them about the existence of the IntLO and get an impression about how the IntLO could be useful to each of them. All core member organisations were visited at least once during the year.

4.0 Work with NGO partners

The most successful part of the work has been the setting up and developing relations with other human rights organisations. There has been tremendous support for the work from colleagues in the international human rights organisations, and there is potential for tapping much more out of these organisations.

Strong statements and campaigns have come from many NGOs, in particular Amnesty International, the International Bar Association (IBA), the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) and the Law Society of England and Wales. During both of the NGO preparatory meetings for the ACHPR, Pretoria (May) and Banjul (October), there was unanimous support for a strong condemnation of the Zimbabwean government's human rights violations by all NGOs present, both African and International. The France based International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) has been active in some of the work with the Forum on Zimbabwe. As this is an organisation made up of human rights organisations, they have mentioned that even if ZimRights is already one of their members, there are several countries where more than one organisation is a member.

The Forum is now receiving invitations for a number of events by other NGOs, and is asked to make inputs and contributions, ensuring that the human rights situation in Zimbabwe is firmly on the agenda whenever NGOs meet.

Strong links have been built with the NGOs of exiled Zimbabwean communities, particularly in the UK. This has proved to be of mutual benefit in that the Forum has provided speakers to events that have been organised by Zimbabweans in the Diaspora, at the same time as the IntLO has found volunteers and inspiration in communicating with people concerned with human rights issues in Zimbabwe.

5.0 Work with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)

The main human rights instrument regionally in Africa is the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, adopted by the then OAU on its 18th Assembly in June 1981 in Nairobi. To promote human and peoples' rights the Charter establishes the ACHPR⁴. Later the headquarters of the ACHPR were established in the Gambia.

Initially, the ACHPR did not appear in the plans for IntLO. However, seeing that the IntLO had better possibilities to follow up the ACHPR since it is easier to contact the Gambia from London than from Harare, as well as that many of the NGO partners in London and other parts of Europe are working to try to influence the Commissioners, it was decided that the IntLO should get involved in the Forum work with the ACHPR. This particularly to benefit from the NGO contacts that IntLO has developed. These contacts have been actively used for preparations of the Forum's participation in the sessions and for lobbying during the sessions.

The main focus of the work has been to follow up the Communication to the ACHPR on torture that the Forum's Legal Unit produced in late 2001.

The first ACHPR meeting, where the Forum participated, was the 31st Session of the ACHPR, held in Pretoria in May. The Forum representatives were the Chairperson, Mr. Tawanda Hondora; one board member, Mr. Albert Musarurwa, Director LRF and the Chairperson of ZimRights, Mr. Arnold Tsunga as well as the IntLO coordinator.

⁴ African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights: Article 30.

At this meeting three major achievements were made:

- Firstly, the African NGO Forum ahead of the ACHPR session adopted a strong statement on Zimbabwe, which was an excellent lobbying tool for the session. A former staff member of the Forum, Gabriel Shumba and a representative of one of the member organisations ZimRights, Arnold Tsunga, chairperson, were on the drafting committee at the NGO Forum;
- Secondly, the ACHPR was seized with the Communication sent by the Forum, so that they are now for the first time working on a communication on Zimbabwe;
- Thirdly, the ACHPR decided that they would send a fact-finding mission to the Forum.

The ACHPR mission came to Zimbabwe in June and met with several of the member organisations.

The Forum's Communication was due to be considered for admissibility at the 32nd session of the ACHPR in the Gambia in October. The Forum therefore sent a big delegation to this session as well. This session was however hampered by the absence and late arrivals of Commissioners to the extent that the ACHPR was not quorum until very late in its deliberations. The Zimbabwean Government was also not present. To make matters worse, the Government of the Gambia was not able to contribute financially to the hosting of the session as promised, which led to the session being reduced from two weeks to one. The Commission therefore hardly had time to make any decisions, and our Communication was deferred.

However the Forum was again represented on the drafting committee of the NGO Forum, through the Chairperson of ZimRights, Arnold Tsunga. And again the NGO Forum made a strong and unanimous statement on Zimbabwe with a number of recommendations to the ACHPR. However this was not reflected in the final statement of the ACHPR.

6.0 Work with the EU

The cooperation between the Zimbabwean government and the EU deteriorated strongly from the beginning of the year, when Zimbabwe decided to invite only 9 of the 15 member countries to send observers to the presidential elections. Sweden that was heading the EU election observation team was among those not invited. The head of the team was deported in January. This deportation combined with the politically motivated violence and the changes in the electoral laws, made the EU decide to withdraw all of their election observers at the end of January. The EU then decided to introduce targeted sanctions against Zimbabwe on 18 February 2002.

The original proposal for the IntLO included very frequent visits to Brussels to follow events there. Since the Commission of the EU, which has in the past not been so active on Zimbabwe is based in Brussels this was seen as important.

The European Parliament (EP) spends most of its time in Brussels, and since the EP has in the past made strong statements on the issue of human rights in Zimbabwe it was thought easy to get contacts there. It however became evident that much of the decisions of the EU are made in the capitals of the member states, particularly the capital of the presiding country. The power of the European Parliament is still limited.

These lessons, combined with the strong decisions on 18 February led to the IntLO only visited Brussels 5 times during the year (reduced from the original 12). These visits focussed on establishing contacts with relevant politicians in all the major political groups in the parliament, desk officers in the Commission and NGOs.

A new ACP-EU Partnership Agreement signed in Cotonou on 23 June 2000 to replace the Lome Convention (the Agreement was however still not ratified at the end of 2002). This Agreement places more emphasis on good governance and human rights than previous agreements/conventions, through a new political dimension. The work of this partnership therefore seemed to be getting more interesting seen from the Forum's viewpoint. One of the main instruments political instruments of the ACP-EU cooperation is a joint assembly. In the Cotonou Agreement this is changed to the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA) and mandated to look at democratic processes and the rest of the political dimension in addition to the work of the previous joint assembly. The JPA meets twice a year.

In March the JPA of the ACP and the EU held its 4th session in Cape Town. This session adopted a resolution strongly condemning the human rights situation in Zimbabwe. After that Zimbabwe was placed on the JPA agenda as the only individual country.

The Forum therefore decided to follow processes in the ACP – EU cooperation, in particular the JPA. A decision was made to send a delegation targeting the 5th session of the JPA. This session was however cancelled (see point 3.2.2).

7.0 Work with the Commonwealth

The main document outlining the Commonwealth countries obligations to human rights is the Harare Declaration adopted by the Heads of Governments Meeting in 1991. The Milbrook Plan of Action adopted in 1995 is the follow up, which outlines measures to be taken against member states that are found to be in breach the Harare Declaration. The main instrument set up to monitor member countries compliance with the Harare Declaration is the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG).

In December 2001 CMAG placed Zimbabwe on its agenda. During 2002 Zimbabwe was one of four Commonwealth countries on the CMAG agenda⁵.

The situation in Zimbabwe is closely monitored by the Commonwealth, and a very big delegation was sent to observe the presidential elections in March.

⁵ The other countries being Fiji, Pakistan and the Solomon Islands.

The Commonwealth observers in their report concluded that the elections were in breach of the Commonwealth agreed standards for elections. The Commonwealth therefore decided to suspend Zimbabwe from the Councils of the Commonwealth for one year on 19 March.

The IntLO immediately after setting up its office in London, established contacts with the Zimbabwe desk officer of the Policy Unit of the Commonwealth Secretariat, as well as the head of its Human Rights Unit. There have been regular meetings with these and other officials, particularly in connection with visits from Zimbabwe. The work with the Commonwealth has mainly been focussed on information exchange, since no particular lobbying goals were identified after the suspension of Zimbabwe from the main organs of the organisation. It has also been noted that the Crisis Committee, an umbrella of around 250 civil society organisations, including most of the Forum's member organisations, has focussed much of their international lobby work towards the Commonwealth and it should be considered how to coordinate work so that efforts are not duplicated.

8.0 Work with the UN

In the initial brief of IntLO, work with the UN bodies was not included. However, the Forum's chair and coordinator accepted invitations to participate in the Freedom House (a US human rights organisation) delegation to the 58th Session of the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) in March / April.

This participation gave insight into the works of the Commission and it became evident that the UNHRC should be given more emphasis by the Forum.

Throughout the rest of the year contacts were maintained with human rights NGOs based in Geneva and new contacts were made with the thematic mechanisms of the UNHRC through these and through NGOs in London.

No communications have been submitted to the UN mechanisms directly from the Forum, but discussions have started between the Legal Unit, the Research Unit and the IntLO on how this could happen. Also the IntLO has been supporting communications by AI and other NGOs by providing information when approached on individual cases.

9.0 Conclusion

The main conclusion is that having an international liaison office has been very useful for the Forum.

The increased focus on human rights in Zimbabwe, particularly through the increased use of our reports by politicians and the media, and Forum presence at important international events is the main benefit. Also IntLO is providing contacts, decision makers and media with an easier access to alternative information about the situation in the country.

Attachment 1.

List of member organisations as of 31 December 2002

Core member organisations of the Human Rights Forum are:

- Amani Trust
- Amnesty International (Zimbabwe) (AI (Z))
- Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP)
- Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ)
- Legal Resources Foundation (LRF)
- Transparency International (Zimbabwe) (TI (Z))
- University of Zimbabwe Legal Aid and Advice Scheme
- Zimbabwe Association for Crime Prevention and the Rehabilitation of the Offender (ZACRO)
- Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust (ZIMCET)
- Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights)
- Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR)
- Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association (ZWLA)

Associate Member:

Non Violent Action and Strategies for Social Change (NOVASC)