



Zimbabwe
HUMAN RIGHTS
NGO Forum

18 April 2011

**PRESS STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF ZIMBABWE'S 31ST
ANNIVERSARY OF INDEPENDENCE**

The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (the Forum) congratulates the nation on attaining 31 years of independence from colonial rule. This is the time for the people of Zimbabwe to reflect on the past, the present and the future. This year the country commemorates the day in an environment which is marred by political violence, harassment of political activists and human rights defenders, intimidation of the nation at large and limited enjoyment of civil liberties.

The year to date has seen an upsurge in cases of political violence which has spread throughout the country with impunity, despite the existence of the Government of National Unity, premised on the Global Political Agreement. In signing this Agreement the parties pledged among other things, “*to denounce and desist from the promotion and use of violence, under whatever name called, as a means of attaining political ends.*” They also undertook to guarantee “*the full implementation and realization of the right to freedom of association and assembly,*” “*adhere to the principles of the rule of law*” and to promote “*equality, national healing, cohesion and unity.*” These are all values to which the liberation struggle subscribed. The reality on the ground, 31 years on, does not support these lofty aspirations.

The nation continues to be polarized, human rights defenders are harassed and arbitrarily arrested for doing their work, freedom of association and

assembly is curtailed, the Press is threatened and the law is flouted for political gain. All this is aggravated by the uncertainty over a future election.

The Forum is concerned that the gains that the nation anticipated independence would bring have not been fully realized. In celebrating 31 years of independence, the Forum implores political leaders to put national interests ahead of party or personal interests in order to achieve the true freedom, liberty, sovereignty and realization of human rights that independence should have bestowed.

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