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Protect, Prevent, Live Well

May 9, 2008

Ban Ki-moon
Secretary General
United Nations
First Ave. at 46th St.
New York, NY 10017

Alpha Oumar Konare
Chairperson
African Union
P.O. Box 3243
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Dear Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and Chairperson Alpha Oumar Konare:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association (APHA), I write to express our concern about the situation in Zimbabwe and its effect on the health of citizens, as well as the ability of health and humanitarian aid workers to provide care and assistance to those in need. Founded in 1872, APHA is the oldest, largest and most diverse organization of public health professionals in the world and has a long-standing commitment to promoting global health and protecting the health of all citizens of the world from preventable, serious health threats.

Since the election in Zimbabwe on March 29, 2008, credible reports from human rights organizations, medical organizations, embassies in Zimbabwe, and journalists, as well as sworn statements by citizens of Zimbabwe, have demonstrated that the government and ruling ZANU-PF party have inflicted terror, violence and intimidation against individuals associated with the opposition Movement for Democratic Change or citizens who might in the future vote for the opposition. The violence has included beatings and other forms of physical assault, burning of homes and villages, and torture.¹

As of April 23, 2008, the independent, non-partisan Zimbabwean Association of Doctors for Human Rights (ZADHR) has evaluated 323 individuals who were physically assaulted by government and government-sponsored forces since April 1, and these cases only represent a fraction of the assaults. ZADHR found many cases of fractures, soft tissue injuries, hematomas, and falanga, the last a form of torture in which bars or sticks are used to beat a person's feet and which can cause life-long disability.²

Moreover, health and humanitarian aid workers are also being targeted and prevented from providing medical care and other forms of aid to citizens associated with the opposition. The

¹ Human Rights Watch, Zimbabwe: Surge in State-Sponsored Violence, April 25, 2008.
<http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2008/04/25/zimbab18653.htm>.

Celia Dugger, Signs of Attacks on Zimbabwe's Opposition, New York Times, April 28, 2008.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/28/world/africa/28zimbabwe.html?scp=5&sq=zimbabwe+&st=nyt>.

Mugabe minister accused of gun threats, Guardian.Co.UK, April 10, 2008.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/apr/21/zimbabwe> Zimbabwe health minister accused as terror campaign reaches hospital wards, Times Online, April 29, 2008.
<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/africa/article3835622.ece>

² Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights, Violent Assault and Torture Remains Unchecked, 23 April 2008. See also Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights, Cases of Post Election Violence Continue to Escalate, April 18, 2008.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, has expressed "concern about reports of threats, intimidation, abuse and violence directed against NGOs, election monitors, human rights defenders and other representatives of civil society."³

In April 2007, the World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA) condemned assaults and torture on peaceful demonstrators in Zimbabwe and the denial of medical care to persons suffering injuries as a result.⁴ Moreover, one of our partner associations, the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA), has had programmatic ties with Zimbabwe since the late 1980's. CPHA supported the Zimbabwe Public Health Association (ZPHA) in its efforts to strengthen that country's public health capacity in the 1990's and also supported several NGOs and the Ministry of Health of Zimbabwe in their efforts to expand and improve the effectiveness of the country's Expanded Program on Immunization. Since 1991, CPHA, through the Southern African AIDS Training Program, has supported many Zimbabwean NGOs and community-based organizations to build organizational capacity and to contribute to the design and implementation of local HIV/AIDS prevention, care, support, and treatment activities within their respective communities.

The APHA urges the United Nations and the African Union to condemn the violence inflicted by the government of Zimbabwe and its proxies on citizens of that country and to take all steps needed to protect people from assault, assure respect for the rule of law, meet the health and humanitarian needs of the people of Zimbabwe, and protect organizations in Zimbabwe working to protect health and human rights.

Furthermore, APHA, in collaboration with other WFPHA members, is committed to identifying how our organization might contribute, once the situation permits it, to rebuilding the public health system in Zimbabwe and ZPHA. We express our solidarity with our Zimbabwean counterparts and all of the people of Zimbabwe in getting through these difficult times and leading healthy lives through the expression of their public health rights.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Georges C. Benjamin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Georges" being the most prominent part.

Georges C. Benjamin, MD, FACP, FACEP (Emeritus)
Executive Director

³ Alarmed by Violence in Zimbabwe, Arbour urges Restraint. Press Release, <http://www.unhcr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/view01/BB073B7B294BC46FC1257438003A0672?opendocument> (no date).

⁴ World Federation of Public Health Associations Condemns Human Rights Abuses in Zimbabwe, Statement by Dr. S.M. Asib Nasim, President, and Barbara Hatcher, Interim Secretary General, April 27, 2007.