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Zimbabwe: Trial of Trade Union Leaders Delayed; Opposition Withdraws from Election

Brussels, 23 June 2008 (ITUC OnLine): The trial of Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) President Lovemore Matombo and Secretary General Wellington Chibebe, scheduled for a hearing today, has been delayed by a week. The two trade union leaders, charged with "communicating falsehoods" and "inciting the public to rise against the government", appeared today at Harare Magistrates' Court only to find that the magistrate expected to hear the case, and the state prosecutor, were absent.

After several hours wait, another magistrate took up the matter and postponed the hearing until 30 June.

ITUC affiliates in southern Africa and several other countries protested to Zimbabwe embassies today over the trial of Matombo and Chibebe, as the crisis in Zimbabwe deepened and MDC opposition candidate Morgan Tsvangirai withdrew from the presidential election. The ITUC, with its Belgian affiliates, handed over a protest <

">http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Letter_delivered_to_the_Zim_embassy_23-06-08.pdf>

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The MDC cited a campaign of violence and terror by the Zimbabwean military and militia aligned with the ruling party of Robert Mugabe. According to the MDC, some 3,000 militia bases have been set up around the country to stop the opposition's election campaign through beatings and intimidation, the opposition is being denied media coverage by the authorities, and a series of steps have been taken by Mugabe's ZANU-PF Party to exert total control over the election process. Some 200,000 Zimbabweans are believed to have been displaced during the latest round of violence, and around 2,000 MDC officials and members are believed to be currently in detention.

Citing the dozens of politically-motivated killings, ZCTU General Council members meeting last Friday stated that the level of violence has reached "alarming if not catastrophic proportions" and declared that the ZCTU "would not accept the outcome of a flawed election".

The ITUC represents 168 million workers in 155 countries and territories and has 311 national affiliates. Website: <http://www.ituc-csi.org>

For more information, please contact the ITUC Press Department on: +32 2 224 0204 or +32 476 621 018.

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