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Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

Zimbabwe – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 21 October 2011

Treatment of failed asylum seekers, particularly if perceived as anti Zanu PF.

An *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* response to a request for information on the treatment of people returned to Zimbabwe states:

“The Central Intelligence Organisation and other security forces take a keen interest in those who have been deported back to Zimbabwe. This is not only the case regarding those arriving through the airport, but those who use the road as well. In particular, those who have failed in their asylum applications are invariably interrogated by security agents stationed at the airport, or those that deal with those deported from for example Botswana and South Africa when the deportees arrive at various stations e.g. Plumtree or Beitbridge. At Harare International Airport, the practice is much more rigorous as it is the main international airport serving the country. There are rooms to which individuals are taken for interrogation [...]. The practice continues in spite of the existence of an inclusive government as the security sector is largely in the hands of ZANU (PF).” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (17 August 2010) *ZWE103563.E – Zimbabwe: Treatment of people returned to Zimbabwe upon their arrival at Harare Airport, including whether citizens are interrogated (2008 - August 2010)*)

In October 2009 *The Guardian* reported on the return of failed asylum seekers from Britain, stating:

“Donna Covey, of the Refugee Council, criticised the decision to consider forcing Zimbabweans to return. ‘In the past few days allegations of arrest, intimidation and harassment of supporters of the MDC and of human rights defenders have been widely reported. Our government is showing a cavalier attitude to the safety of refugees who have stood up for democracy and human rights,’ she said.” (The Guardian (29 October 2009) *Home Office offers failed asylum seekers cash to return to Zimbabwe*)

A *UK Home Office* fact-finding mission report, in a section headed “Interviews With Returnees (Complete Transcripts)” (paragraph 5.1), states:

“All the returnees who were interviewed stated that they had previously claimed asylum in the United Kingdom. Reasons given for claiming asylum were the unstable political environment and political violence. Most returnees arrived back in Zimbabwe in 2010; one returned in January 2009 – all returned voluntarily. Three returned using their own passport; three returned using an Emergency Travel Document (ETD); and three interviewees did not state what document was used to re-enter Zimbabwe. None of the returnees reported any significant problems upon arrival at Harare airport. Three returnees were either questioned and/or had their bags searched. One

returnee (interview number 4) was required to pay a US\$20 bribe to security staff at Harare airport. While one returnee (3) stated that he was concerned that he would face problems at Harare airport, these concerns proved unfounded. Another returnee (5) believed that airport staff would think that he was a failed asylum seeker because he was travelling under an ETD. However, the returnee stated that apart from being questioned about why he was travelling on the ETD no significant problems were encountered. Most returnees reported that they were aware of others who had returned to Zimbabwe (sometimes on the same flight) without any problems. While most were unable to comment in detail, a couple of returnees noted that they were still in contact with a small number of returnees who appear to be free of harassment from state officials.” (UK Home Office (21 September 2010) *Report of Fact-Finding Mission to Zimbabwe, Harare: 9-17 August 2010*)

An article on the return of Zimbabweans from the United Kingdom published by the South Africa based *Sunday Times* states:

“In the landmark ruling, immigration judge Justice Blake stated it is now safe to return people to the country. In 2006, the British Home Office halted forced repatriation to Zimbabwe. The deportation of individuals to the politically unstable country meant their safety could not be guaranteed. But in October last year, after a Home Office fact-finding trip to Zimbabwe, Immigration Minister Damian Green announced it would again repatriate failed asylum-seekers. This new ruling gives the Home Office the green light from the courts to go ahead, despite the refugees insisting it is still not safe to return. Danford Mahlanze, a failed asylum-seeker, said: ‘Mugabe and Zanu-PF are on the rampage in Zimbabwe. It’s really bad. I’m not going back. Failed asylum-seekers will go into hiding in the UK because of this ruling. They will rather suffer in the UK than go back. You can’t get assistance to any food or help but it’s better than going back.’ Takwana Jonga, London co-ordinator of the Zimbabwe Action Group, said: ‘Every asylum-seeker I know is panicking and running scared because they know what fate awaits them in Zimbabwe. The question they are asking is, what is going to happen at Harare Airport when they get deported? Many of these people have spoken against the Zimbabwean government and as we all know, it’s a crime in Zimbabwe.’” (Sunday Times (South Africa) (20 March 2011) *‘Hiding is better than going home’*)

A *Zimbabwe Independent* article states:

“Zimbabwe’s coalition government has no capacity to look after failed asylum seekers set to be deported from neighbouring South Africa in the coming months. Reports suggest that thousands of failed asylum seekers would be expelled. However, most failed asylum seekers have shown a reluctance to return home citing the country’s high unemployment rate presently estimated at 80%. Already, six provinces are experiencing serious food shortages while millions have no access to clean water and sanitation.” (Zimbabwe Independent (18 August 2011) *Zimbabwe: Govt Unprepared for Failed Asylum Seekers*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to

the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

References:

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European Country of Origin Information Network

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Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database

Refugee Review Tribunal

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