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IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Zimbabwe: The Mthwakazi Liberation Front (MLF), including structure, leadership, membership, objectives, activities, and areas of operation; treatment of members by authorities (2013-April 2018) [ZWE106091.E]

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1. MLF

Sources state that the MLF was launched in Bulawayo in December 2010 (*PHW* 2017, 1717; OEAS n.d.), after being "[b]orn" in Johannesburg (OEAS n.d.). Sources indicate that the MLF is also known as the Matabeleland Liberation Front (*PHW* 2017, 1717; *The Zimbabwe Daily* 4 May 2011). According to sources, the MLF seeks secession of Matabeleland (*PHW* 2017, 1717; *Southern Eye* 7 Sept. 2015; *New Zimbabwe* 6 Dec. 2013) and the Midlands regions from Zimbabwe [1] (*New Zimbabwe* 6 Dec. 2013). According to sources, the MLF seeks to create a state for the Ndebele people (*Southern Eye* 7 Sept. 2015; MRG 28 June 2012, 77), Zimbabwe's largest minority group [2] (MRG April 2018). According to the *Political Handbook of the World* (*PHW*), 82 percent of the population of African descent in Zimbabwe are the Shona majority, located in the north of the country, while the Ndebele are "concentrated in the southern area of Matabeleland" (*PHW* 2017, 1709). According to Minority Rights Group International (MRG), the "Ndebele-speaking community mak[es] up around 17 per cent of the total population" [3] (MRG April 2018).

2. Structure, Membership, Leadership, and Treatment by Authorities

Information on the MLF's structure and membership could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.1 Leadership

Sources indicate that Fidelis Ncube, also known as "General Nandinandi," was the group's leader (*NewsDay* 21 Nov. 2016; *Southern Eye* 10 May 2016) until 2016 (*Southern Eye* 10 May 2016). A 2015 article by Zimbabwe newspaper *Southern Eye* reports that

Ncube was based in South Africa (*Southern Eye* 7 Sept. 2015), while a 2016 article by the same source indicates that he was based in Botswana when he stepped down (*Southern Eye* 10 May 2016). According to the same source, "Ncube was ordered to step down after the Botswana government complained that as a [Botswana] citizen, he could not continue being actively involved in party politics outside its borders" (*Southern Eye* 10 May 2016).

The Organization of Emerging African States (OEAS), an intergovernmental organization "promoting national self determination in Africa and an end to colonial era boundaries and oppression," indicates that the MLF is headquartered in Johannesburg, South Africa (OEAS n.d.). According to *Southern Eye*, as of September 2015, most MLF officials were based in South Africa, the UK, and the US, including "[then] Ncube's deputy Churchill Guduza, Andrea Sibanda (secretary-general) and David Magagula (spokesperson)" (*Southern Eye* 7 Sept. 2015). A May 2016 *Southern Eye* article indicates that Spokesperson David Magagula was fired approximately a month after Ncube stepped down as leader (*Southern Eye* 10 May 2016). According to a November 2016 article by Zimbabwean daily *NewsDay*, Magagula's expulsion caused "[s]erious infighting" as "[s]ections of the party, mostly those based in Zimbabwe, have expressed discontent with Magagula's dismissal, while the top leadership based in South Africa accused him of causing instability in the party" (*NewsDay* 21 Nov. 2016). The same source notes that "Magagula has also been accused of continuing to use" the MLF's name (*NewsDay* 21 Nov. 2016).

A 2016 article by Bulawayo24 News, a Bulawayo-based online news source, names Ndabezinhle Fuyane as MLF spokesperson for Bulawayo (Bulawayo24 News 13 July 2016). Sources state that as of 2016 [Mpiyezwé] Churchill Guduza was MLF acting president (*NewsDay* 21 Nov. 2016; *Southern Eye* 1 Aug. 2016). A June 2017 article by *NewsDay* states that Guduza was appointed party president with Nkosinathi Mkhwanazi, who had previously been the national chairperson, serving as a deputy president; Andrea Sibanda remained secretary general; and that Edmos Khumalo became national chairperson, assisted by three unnamed provincial chairpersons (*NewsDay* 26 June 2017). The same source also names the following executive members: "Gerald Smith (international relations secretary), Artwell Mnguni (treasurer), Duncan Dlamini fundraising sec[re]tary), Mthetheleli Khumalo (acting national youth chair) and Thandi Nkomo (women affairs)" (*NewsDay* 26 June 2017). Sources name David Mpofu as MLF chairman as of April 2018 (Bulawayo24 News 12 Apr. 2018; *NewsDay* 11 April 2018).

2.2 Treatment by Authorities

According to a 2015 article by *Southern Eye*, South Africa-based international relations secretary Chrispen Nyoni indicated that since the party's founding in 2010, "several locally-based party members had been persecuted by the government, while three top officials have been charged with treason" (*Southern Eye* 7 Sept. 2015). *Southern Eye* adds that "President Robert Mugabe has threatened to clamp down heavily on the secessionist leaders" (*Southern Eye* 7 Sept. 2015). According to sources, MLF leaders Paul Siwela, Charles Thomas, and John Gazi were charged with treason in 2011 (*PHW* 2017, 1717; *Southern Eye* 7 Sept. 2015; *New Zimbabwe* 7 Jan. 2014). According to *New Zimbabwe*, "[t]he MLF leaders have denied ever conspiring to incite Zimbabweans or a

section of them to rise against the government," while "[p]rosecutors allege that between March 1 and 3, 2011, Siwela and Thomas and seven other members of the MLF held a meeting in Bulawayo" and planned "to distribute fliers with inciting messages" (*New Zimbabwe* 7 Jan. 2014). According to sources, Gazi and Thomas were acquitted, while Siwela left the country before the matter was settled (*Southern Eye* 7 Sept. 2015; *The Chronicle* 18 Oct. 2014). *New Zimbabwe* reports that, in January 2014, Charles Thomas indicated that he was "brutally assaulted by police as they tried to force information from him" at Entumbane Police Station (*New Zimbabwe* 23 Jan. 2014).

According to sources, Siwela, who was an executive member of the MLF (*New Zimbabwe* 6 Dec. 2013), left the country in 2013 after receiving death threats (SW Radio Africa 7 Dec. 2013; *New Zimbabwe* 6 Dec. 2013). According to SW Radio Africa, an independent radio station, Siwela indicated that "after he was released from three months solitary confinement he was attacked several times at his home at night and reported the matter to the police and asked for protection. But this was denied him" (SW Radio Africa 7 Dec. 2013). *Southern Eye* also reports that a letter written by Siwela indicates that "[s]everal reports in the past were made to Queens Park Police Station [in Bulawayo] and [a] request for police protection was made without success" (*Southern Eye* 8 Dec. 2013). The SW Radio Africa article quotes Siwela as stating that "[e]ven if they detain me in prison under the pretext of protecting me[,] how would I be safe from the State since the prisons are run by the same State that wants to kill me" (SW Radio Africa 7 Dec. 2013). A 2015 *Southern Eye* article indicates that Siwela, an MLF founder, left the MLF to lead the Matabeleland Liberation Organisation (MLO) (*Southern Eye* 13 July 2015). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Activities

Information on MLF activities was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

MRG indicates that Paul Siwela stated that the "MLF's activities would continue to be peaceful unless the state initiated aggression," although MRG added that "concerns about violent outbreaks remain" (MRG 28 June 2012, 77). *New Zimbabwe*, a weekly newspaper published in the UK, also indicates that former MLF leader Fidelis Ncube has said that the group "will first resort to peaceful means but if that fails they will resort to other methods that he refused to specify to achieve their goals" (*New Zimbabwe* 21 July 2014).

A December 2012 article from *NewsDay* indicates that the MLF "distanced itself from other political parties from the Matabeleland region which have reportedly formed a coalition and pledged to jointly rally behind [main opposition party Movement for Democratic Change, MDC] leader Welshman Ncube as presidential candidate" in the 2013 elections (*NewsDay* 6 Dec. 2012). Although sources reported that the MLF is a member of the Alliance Khumbul' Ekaya (AKE), a coalition, formed in 2012, of opposition political parties (Southern African News Features 31 July 2013; *NewsDay* 6 Dec. 2012) "to collectively mobilise resources for candidates ahead of" the 2013 elections (*NewsDay* 6 Dec. 2012), *NewsDay* reports that MLF spokesperson Isaiah

Magagula denied this and "said his party had not entered into an alliance with any political, civic or non-governmental organisation in the region" (*NewsDay* 6 December 2012). The same source also quotes Magagula as stating that the "MLF has nothing, and will have nothing to do with Zimbabwe, let alone elections that serve no purpose. All MLF wants from Zimbabwe is Mthwakazi independence" and that the "MLF will use and exhaust all peaceful means possible to gain our independence, excluding engaging in elections" (*NewsDay* 6 Dec. 2012). *PHW* indicates that the MLF boycotted Zimbabwe's 2013 election (*PHW* 2017, 1717).

New Zimbabwe reports that, in 2014, the MLF announced that it would present a "secession letter" or "serve divorce papers" to the government by the end of 2014 (*New Zimbabwe* 21 July 2014).

According to sources, there were protests in July 2016 against the government, including a "shutdown" of businesses, shops (BBC 13 July 2016; *The Guardian* 11 July 2016), and schools (BBC 13 July 2016). A July 2016 article by Bulawayo24 News indicates that the MLF "blasted the police for their brutality on the Shutdown protesters" which was "said to have caused the death of some youth in Makokoba in Bulawayo" (Bulawayo24 News 13 July 2016).

An April 2018 *NewsDay* article states that police in Bulawayo "blocked [the MLF] from conducting a prayer meeting for Gukurahundi victims" (*NewsDay* 11 April 2018).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] *New Zimbabwe* indicates that the MLF wants to create a "separate state which would run from the country's western border to as far as Kwekwe, Shurugwi and Mberengwa" (*New Zimbabwe* 21 July 2014).

[2] MRG indicates that the MLF's "desire for an independent state stems from wanting to redress the perceived socio-economic discrimination towards Ndebele by the Shona majority," noting that the Ndebele have been discriminated against through land distribution programmes (MRG 28 June 2012, 77). According to *PHW*, "Shona-Ndebele rivalry dates to the 19th century and has contributed to a pronounced north-south cleavage" (*PHW* 2017, 1709).

[3] According to MRG, the Ndebele have traditionally been cattle-keepers in the region around present-day Bulawayo and were the main victims of the civil war in the 1980s and experienced government neglect in the 1980s, 1990s, and into the 2000s (MRG April 2018). An article written by Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, a professor at the University of South Africa with many publications on Zimbabwean nationalism, indicates that "the violence of the 1980s that is remembered in Matabeleland and the Midlands regions as

[the] 'Gukurahundi genocide' has generated radical politics of secession spearheaded by diaspora-based political formations," such as the MLF (Ndlovu-Gatsheni Dec. 2012, 17).

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Researchers who study nationalism in Zimbabwe.

Internet sites, including: *Africa Confidential*; *Africa Spectrum*; Al Jazeera; Amnesty International; Australia – Refugee Review Tribunal; CBC; Center for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies; DailyNews Live; ecoi.net; *The Financial Gazette*; Freedom House; Human Rights Watch; Institute for War and Peace Reporting; International Crisis Group; International Federation for Human Rights; Ireland – Refugee Documentation Centre; IRIN; *Jane's Intelligence Review*; Organisation suisse d'aide aux réfugiés; Radio France internationale; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; Reuters; UN – OHCHR, Refworld, ReliefWeb, UNHCR; US – Congressional Research Service, Department of State; Zimbabwe – Government Portal; *The Zimbabwe Independent*; Zimbabwe Peace Project.

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