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Old COI suggests that the MDC stopped issuing membership cards in 2002. What is the up to date situation?

What is the situation in relation to issuing membership cards for members of MDCM and the MDCT?

No information on the issuing of membership cards for MDCM and MDCT members could be found among sources consulted by the Refugee Documentation Centre.

A response by the *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* under the heading 'Replacement of Membership Cards' states:

"The MDC-USA secretariat indicate that many Zimbabweans have continued their membership in Zimbabwe. They have renewed membership and have the same cards obtained on their behalf by relatives and friends after paying the card and subscription fees mentioned above. Replacement of cards is easy for our members [of the MDC-USA]. Those who claim to be members elsewhere we cannot replace their card but can issue a new one based on the date they join one of our Districts. (20 Apr. 2011)" (*Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* (5 May 2011) ZWE103731.E *Zimbabwe: Whether the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) is still active in Canada; whether MDC branches outside of Zimbabwe can verify the identity and replace the lost membership cards of those members who were originally issued cards in Zimbabwe; whether the MDC membership cards display the date of original membership; whether MDC branches would report the original membership date if requested; location of other MDC branches and chapters*)

In a section titled 'Practice of Issuing Membership Cards' it states:

"According to the former chairperson, any MDC branch outside Zimbabwe can issue cards, but they must obtain them from the office of the treasurer-general in Harare (6 Apr. 2011). In return for the cards, the branches remit membership fees and donations to the treasurer-general and his deputy (Former Chairperson 6 Apr. 2011). To his knowledge, MDC Toronto was the only branch in Canada issuing membership cards (ibid. 15 Apr. 2011). The Toronto branch continued to issue membership cards until its stock was depleted, with the last such card issued in the first few months of 2011 (ibid. 6 Apr. 2011). However, some MDC members in Canada have cards that were issued in other countries where the MDC is present and so never obtained new cards in Canada (ibid.). He explained that when MDC Toronto was established, they tried to exchange older cards held by members for the cards issued by MDC Toronto to avoid duplication, but stopped doing this (ibid. 15 Apr. 2011).

The former chairperson stated that individuals in Canada could join the Toronto branch by attending MDC meetings or getting in touch with the MDC Toronto treasurer, who was responsible for registering members (ibid.). Officially, potential members are required to be citizens of Zimbabwe, to not belong to any other political party in Zimbabwe and to adhere to the code of conduct of the party (ibid.). He also explained that the membership cards, like those for many political parties in Zimbabwe, were originally issued as a means to raise funds for the MDC and not as a method to prove membership (ibid.). As a result, the membership cards have taken on a "life of their own" (ibid.)." (ibid)

It also states under the heading 'New Version of the Membership Card'

"The former chairperson stated that the MDC in Zimbabwe began issuing a new version of the membership card in 2010, the fourth such version (ibid. 6 Apr. 2011). Other sources corroborate that a new MDC membership card was launched in Zimbabwe in 2010 (MDC-USA 22 Dec. 2010; Nehanda Radio 9 Sept. 2010; ChangeZimbabwe.com 27 Aug. 2010). According to the online news site ChangeZimbabwe.com, the new card was launched at the end of August 2010 (ibid.). The news site quoted the MDC as stating that "membership registration will also be available on-line for Zimbabweans based outside the country, and [that] external provinces would receive their cards after registration online" (ibid.). MDC-UK and Ireland members were reportedly concerned about the change because they felt that party structures of those branches that are abroad would be sidestepped (ibid.). However, the former chairperson explained that the idea of registering members online did not go far and was not implemented (15 Apr. 2011). According to him, it was an effort to centralize membership and recruitment which did not take off as originally intended (Former Chairperson 15 Apr. 2011).

The MDC-USA made the new card available at the end of 2010 (MDC-USA 22 Dec. 2010; Nehanda Radio 9 Sept. 2010). The new card replaced the previous version, which was set to expire at the end of 2010 (ibid.; MDC-USA 22 Dec. 2010). According to the chairperson of the MDC-USA, in an article on the MDC-USA website, among the advantages of issuing the new card are being able to provide an "accurate and centralised membership database" as well as "a recognizable form of MDC identity by foreign home offices in adjudication of asylum cases" (ibid.). The MDC-USA chairperson also noted that the previous card "provided an inconclusive membership database" and "was being used fraudulently by all sorts of imposters who had no relationship or inkling to be members of the MDC" (ibid.).

The MDC-USA article also provides the following details on the process for issuing membership cards:

The new party card issuing process has a number of firsts compared to the old one. No longer will individual Districts be allowed to keep the cards; there will no longer be any direct exchange of cash for cards as is the current situation. Instead District Treasurers and or their secretaries will maintain a set of registration forms and receipt books. With all the information completed and party card fee and subscription paid, the secretary/treasurer will request the Provincial Treasurer who upon receipt of the information form and subscription will mail the card directly to the address of the member indicated

on the registration form. This new process will be the same for both old and new party members. (MDC-USA 22 Dec. 2010)

In an article on the website of Zimbabwean radio station Nehanda Radio, the MDC-USA chairperson stated that the new process for issuing the card "will regularize our membership, provide [a] one stop data base [which] both the province and the national office can rely on to verify and gauge the strength of our party in real time" (9 Sept. 2010). The chairperson added that the new card will ensure "a long awaited rationalization and authentication of bona fide members of the party" (Nehanda Radio 9 Sept. 2010). The Nehanda Radio article notes that, "[i]t is no secret that many Zimbabweans claim some form of membership to the MDC or another" (9 Sept. 2010).

The MDC-USA secretariat also explained in their correspondence that the new card is "centrally distributed ... from Harare" and it

has the Members' personal information and Province/District they belong to. They cannot be interchanged as the information shown is particular to that individual. (20 Apr. 2011)" (ibid)

Another response by the *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* states:

"According to a representative of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in London, UK, MDC membership cards have an MDC symbol, the MDC Records Officer address: C/O PO Box 3549, Harare, the official cost (ten dollars) of the card, and the card number written on the bottom right hand corner (21 Apr. 2002). Cards are issued throughout the country, to anyone supporting the causes of the MDC (ibid.). There are no criteria for membership (ibid.)..." (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (27 May 2002) ZWE38820.E *Zimbabwe: Standard cards for Movement for Democratic Change members; appearance of card; start date and location of issue; criteria for obtaining a card; ability to obtain a card from outside the country; presence of serial numbers on cards; receipts issued; correspondence of serial number on card to number on receipt; ability for non-members to buy a card*)

References:

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (5 May 2011) ZWE103731.E *Zimbabwe: Whether the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) is still active in Canada; whether MDC branches outside of Zimbabwe can verify the identity and replace the lost membership cards of those members who were originally issued cards in Zimbabwe; whether the MDC membership cards display the date of original membership; whether MDC branches would report the original membership date if requested; location of other MDC branches and chapters*

http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca:8080/RIR_RDI/RIR_RDI.aspx?id=453437&l=e

(Accessed 10 June 2011)

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (27 May 2002) ZWE38820.E *Zimbabwe: Standard cards for Movement for Democratic Change members; appearance of card; start date and location of issue; criteria for obtaining a card; ability to obtain a card from outside the country; presence of serial*

numbers on cards; receipts issued; correspondence of serial number on card to number on receipt; ability for non-members to buy a card

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=printdoc&docid=3df4bed08>

(Accessed 10 June 2011)

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.

Sources Consulted:

Amnesty International

European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI)

Electronic Immigration Network (EIN)

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

IRIN News

Lexis Nexis

Freedom House

Human Rights Watch

Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database

UNHCR Refworld

United Kingdom Home Office

United States Department of State