

Amnesty International 5th Human Rights Award

Acceptance Speech

Jenni Williams, Founder/National Coordinator Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA)

Berlin, Germany, November 16 2008

Good evening friends. On behalf of our 75 000 members, we would like to thank Amnesty International and friends here present for the recognition given to Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA).

WOZA was formed to give voice to ordinary women and to demand social justice for all Zimbabweans. We did not set out to seek recognition beyond that of our own government to respect us as citizens and to recognise our concerns as legitimate. We long for the award of true freedom and independence in Zimbabwe.

We, as mothers of the nation, also long for the award of dignity and bright future for our children. I formed WOZA with late Sheba Dube and it is fitting that we remember her today. We also remember our members whose lives were terminated because of police harassment: Maria Moyo, Stella Monda, Fungai Chabata, Tembelani and others.

WOZA was formed to turn a victim mindset into the one of a survivor, determined to finally receive the promises of the liberation war for respect for one person one vote, equality and a right to an education.

Blood was spilt in a violent war for these ideals, this time round WOZA leads a non violent struggle, we are committed to giving non violence a chance to complete the struggle for freedom.

To help us, we draw inspiration from the work of Martin Luther King Junior. He challenged us to „make injustices visible“ and that „fear can be turned into hope“. We modelled our training programmes on his advise and we have a 75 000 strong membership to show for it.

WOZA has never solely been about women in Zimbabwe, it has long been about the voices of ordinary people demanding socio-economic, political and cultural rights. So we would also like to take this opportunity to thank members of Amnesty International for their solidarity whenever we are arrested. These committed friends take the time to send post cards and to telephone police stations and prisons,

prosecutors and magistrates. This intervention is vital to saving our lives as it helps to send a message to the perpetrator that the world is watching. We ask you once again to commit tonight to solidarity with Zimbabweans as we now expect levels of violence to increase.

Zimbabwe is in a state of undeclared civil war. It is not bullets that Robert Mugabe and his structures of violence are using to kill Zimbabweans but enforced famine and an extinguishing of faith in democratic systems of accountability, these are sophisticated forms of mental and physical torture.

Recent events in South Africa have shown that the Southern Africa Development Community does not care about the wishes or best interests of the Zimbabwean people. They will not be able to bring about meaningful change in Zimbabwe. We therefore call on the African Union, together with the United Nations, to intervene in the Zimbabwe crisis.

We ask that they prioritise dealing with the humanitarian crisis and force Robert Mugabe to stop political violence and harassment of democracy activists. Whilst more genuinely engaging the politicians.

Recently we have spent 9 weeks in prison denied bail because of our capacity to mobilise peaceful protest. The magistrate likened us to „incurable unrepentant criminals“.

„Incurable“ because we speak the truth and will not be silenced by baton sticks, arrests, beatings or torture.

„Unrepentant“ because as long as our hearts beat, they beat a demand for dignity and the full enjoyment of all our rights

„Criminals“ because the regime regards our peaceful protest as violence and regards human rights work as the work of criminals. So they put us the peace activists in jail to leave them free to conduct violent campaigns.

So we stand before you as **INCORRIGIBLE AND UNREPENTANT** about demanding respect for all our human rights.

I thank you.