



March 16, 2006

Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister
House of Commons
Prime Minister's Office
111 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Prime Minister,

Re: Decline of the Rule of Law in Zimbabwe

I write to you on behalf of the Canadian Bar Association (CBA) to express our deep concern with the serious violations of human rights and media freedom being committed by the Government of Zimbabwe. We urge the Canadian government to express its condemnation of these actions and support for human rights lawyers in Zimbabwe. It is crucial that Canada, as a respected member of the international community, speak out against the repression of Zimbabweans defending human rights, in light of their government's concerted effort to prevent them from speaking.

The CBA's International Development Committee works with the legal profession in Zimbabwe to support the rule of law and respect for human rights. Amongst other human rights violations, the Government of Zimbabwe has engaged in a systematic eradication of free speech and a free press. The Daily News, the last remaining independent daily newspaper, was closed in September 2003, and the Government has ignored court orders directed at re-opening the newspaper. Foreign correspondents are no longer working in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe's media legislation effectively allows the government to control all aspects of media in the country, with severe penalties for non-compliance.

On January 24, 2006, the Trustees of Voice of the People, Zimbabwe's independent radio station, were arrested. One of the Trustees is Arnold Tsunga, Acting Secretary of the Law Society of Zimbabwe and Director of Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights. ZimRights, a national coalition of human rights organizations, reported to us that on January 26, 2006, it was approached by a soldier of the Zimbabwean army. He advised that the Military Intelligence Corps had been ordered to find Mr. Tsunga and kill him. There is a documented history in Zimbabwe of lawyers viewed as oppositional to the governing ZANU-PF party being arrested, harassed, physically abused and even severely tortured.



These actions demonstrate the ongoing systemic harassment and suppression of the media, the legal profession and human rights defenders in Zimbabwe. It is clear that there is a climate of impunity for government-backed human rights violations in Zimbabwe, up to and including extra-judicial killing.

As an expression of our concern over these recent events, CBA Council passed a resolution at its February 2006 Mid-Winter meeting. The resolution urges the Government of Canada:

- 1. to call upon the Government of Zimbabwe to respect media freedom in accordance with international law and accepted international standards;***
- 2. to support the work of human rights lawyers in Zimbabwe and the Law Society of Zimbabwe in their efforts to protect the rights of individuals that have been affected by the decline in the rule of law in Zimbabwe; and***
- 3. to voice its condemnation of the Government of Zimbabwe's actions of intimidation and harassment towards human rights defenders in Zimbabwe.¹***

We respectfully urge your government to act on these matters without delay.

Yours very truly,

(Original signed by Brian Tabor)

Brian A. Tabor, Q.C.

¹ Resolution 06-10-M.