



Zimbabwe Torture Victims / Survivors Project

Over our dead bodies!

A story of survival

**A report by the Zimbabwe Torture Victims / Survivors
Project**

February 2005 – April 2006

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1 INTRODUCTION

This report provides a brief top-line analysis of 267 Zimbabweans who sought assistance from the Zimbabwe Torture Victims Project (ZTVP), located in Johannesburg, South Africa, over the past one and half years. In recent times, South Africa has seen an increase in the number of Zimbabweans coming into South Africa linked to the political crisis in that country. In particular, since 2002, there has been a massive increase in the number of Zimbabweans requesting political asylum in South Africa. To illustrate, in 2002 approximately 120 Zimbabweans applied for asylum. In 2003, this number increased to approximately 2700, and trebled to 8500 in 2004. By the end of 2005, approximately 16000 Zimbabweans had applied for asylum in South Africa¹. Recent statistics further show that the movement into South Africa of Zimbabweans fleeing persecution is not abating. Instead, for the months of January, February and March 2006, Zimbabwe has come to represent the main country from which the largest number of newly arrived asylum seekers in South Africa derive. In the first quarter of 2006 alone, 7211 Zimbabweans applied for refugee status in South Africa².

A number of studies have sought to document the deepening political crisis in Zimbabwe, patterns of violence and torture in that country, and their links to key political processes, such as elections. In September 2005, the ZTVP undertook a snap survey of Zimbabweans living in five different locations in Gauteng province to obtain a better sense of potential clients that the ZTVP might have to deal with, as well as the proportion of Zimbabweans who might potentially qualify for assistance in terms of need³. That study found evidence to suggest that there would be an increasing need to assist Zimbabweans who had been victims of torture residing in South Africa. To be able to do so, the study concluded that there was a pressing need to gain a better understanding of the position and plight of Zimbabweans who have come to South Africa in search of refuge. It is this need which this brief report seeks to address.

The report provides information about Zimbabweans who reported having been victims of organized violence and torture in Zimbabwe and who are now living in South Africa. It includes information about Zimbabweans who approached the Zimbabwe Torture Victims Project in Johannesburg for assistance. As such, the data analysed in this report cannot be construed as being representative of the entire Zimbabwean population in South Africa. Nonetheless, the findings are indicative of the experiences of Zimbabweans who are coming into South Africa, particularly of many of those who are applying for political asylum, and serve to put to the test, from the point of view of torture victims themselves, some of the existing findings on the patterns of violence and torture in Zimbabwe.

¹ Statistics obtained from the UNHCR and the Department of Home Affairs.

² Department of Home Affairs, Directorate: Refugee Affairs, *2006 First Quarterly Report on Asylum Statistics* (January, February, March 2006) (Pretoria: Refugee Affairs Directorate, April 2006), 5.

³ *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: A window on the situation of Zimbabweans living in Gauteng* (Johannesburg: Zimbabwe Torture Victims Project, September 2005).

The report presents findings derived from data pertaining to 267 Zimbabweans who sought assistance from the ZTVP between January 2005 and April 2006. It provides a brief demographic profile of clients, details about their experiences of violence and torture, as well as the types of assistance rendered by the ZTVP. The data have been analyzed through the use of SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Due to the size of the sample, the analysis is based on basic frequencies and cross-tabulations of the data. Only statistically significant findings are reported.

2 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

2.1 Sex and age

The majority of clients assisted by the ZTVP were men (69%), while less than one third (31%) were women.

Sex	N	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum
Female	83	30.1	29	18	53
Male	184	30.51	30	16	66
Total	267	30.38	30	16	66

Table 1: Age of ZTVP clients by sex

Regardless of sex, the average age of clients was 30 years; however, female clients assisted by ZTVP tended to be slightly younger than male clients. Most clients fell within the economically active population age group.

2.2 Marital status

Less than half of all clients (43% or 115 clients) indicated that they were married. Male clients were significantly more likely than female clients to indicate that they were married.

	N	%
1	30	27
2	36	32
3	24	21
4 or more	22	20
Total	112	100

Table 2: Number of children amongst married clients

The majority of married clients, regardless of sex, had between one and three children, as shown in the table above. On average, married clients had between 2 and 3 children who were alive at the time that they sought assistance from ZTVP.

2.3 Employment in Zimbabwe

Excluding cases where no information was provided (36 cases or 14% of all cases), approximately one fifth of clients seen by ZTVP indicated that they were unemployed (21%) prior to their arrival in South Africa. Considering that the majority of Zimbabweans were employed prior to coming to South Africa, the data obtained seem to challenge the commonly held belief in South Africa that Zimbabweans are coming into the country in search of employment. These statistics show that the majority of torture victims were employed in Z and were therefore fleeing from violence not merely seeking better economic opportunities in SA. The table below provides greater detail about the types of occupations held by clients in Zimbabwe and of the valuable skills that Zimbabweans are bringing into South Africa.

	N	%
Unskilled occupations	74	32
Semi-skilled occupations	58	25
Unemployed	49	21
Skilled occupations	47	20
Student	3	1
Total	231	100

Table 3: Occupations held by clients whilst in Zimbabwe

Almost half of all Zimbabweans in the sample (45%) worked in skilled or semi-skilled occupations whilst in Zimbabwe. More specifically, one fifth of them (20%) were employed in skilled occupations and worked as teachers, nurses, accountants, journalists, social workers and IT specialists, amongst others. In addition, a quarter of them held semi-skilled occupations and worked as electricians, machinists, mechanics, shop assistants and managers. Men were statistically more likely to have held semi-skilled jobs, whereas women were more likely to have been unemployed prior to coming to South Africa.

2.4 Political involvement in Zimbabwe

The majority of Zimbabweans assisted by the ZTVP (69%) indicated that they had been politically active in Zimbabwe. Statistically, men were significantly more likely than women to indicate that this was the case. To illustrate, 75% of all male clients indicated that they had been politically active whilst in Zimbabwe, compared to 58% of all female clients.

Amongst Zimbabweans who stated that they had been politically active in Zimbabwe, two thirds of them (65%) indicated that they were members of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

3 EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE AND TORTURE

3.1 Incidents of violence and torture

In the sample, 40% of Zimbabweans reported having been victims of one torture incident, whereas 41% reported two incidents and 19% reported three or more incidents. Zimbabweans who were politically active in Zimbabwe were significantly more likely than those who were not politically active to report having experienced multiple incidents of torture. To illustrate, 65% of those who reported being politically active experienced two or more incidents of torture, compared to only 45% of those who were not politically active. Similarly, Zimbabweans who reported being members of the MDC were significantly more likely than non-members to report having experienced multiple incidents of torture (i.e. 67% of MDC members experienced two or more incidents of torture compared to 52% of non-MDC members). These findings seem to confirm the findings from previous studies which emphasise that violence and human rights violations in Zimbabwe are neither random acts nor the product of inter-party conflict, but rather linked to important political events such as elections⁴.

3.2 Geographical location of first reported torture incident

The geographical location of first reported incidents of torture would also seem to confirm that these human rights violations are not random acts.

	N	%
Bulawayo	85	35
Matabeleland North	26	11
Matabeleland South	18	8
Mashonaland	26	11
Harare	42	17
Midlands	23	10
Masvingo	11	5
Manicaland	10	4
Total	241	100

Figure 1: Reported geographical location of first incident

In particular, more than half (54%) of ZTVP clients indicated that their first incident of torture was experienced in Matabeleland (North, South or in the city of Bulawayo) – the heartland of political opposition to the ruling party. In contrast, 11% of clients indicated that their first torture incident took place in Mashonaland, the nucleus of Zanu-PF support.

⁴ *Zimbabwe - Tortuous Patterns Destined to Repeat Themselves in Upcoming Election Campaign: Preliminary study of trends and associations in the pattern of torture and organised violence in Zimbabwe, July 2001 - December 2003* (Harare: Redress Trust, November 2004), 27.

3.3 Date of first reported torture incident

Clients were asked to provide the date when the first incident of torture that they experienced took place. The dates of the first reported torture incidents are depicted graphically below.

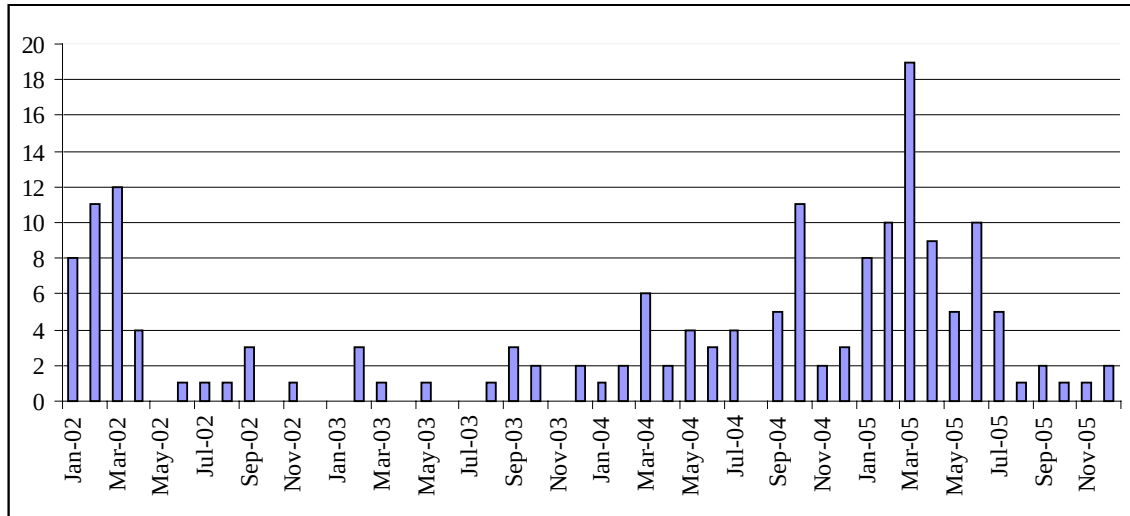


Figure 2: Dates of first torture incident as reported by clients

As it can be observed from the graph above, and consistent with previous studies that have analysed patterns of violence in Zimbabwe⁵, there seems to be a strong correlation between reports of torture and other forms of organized violence and the lead up to important political events such as elections. The figure above shows increasing reports of torture and violence in January and February 2002, leading to the March 2002 presidential elections, and in January and February 2005, leading up to the March 2005 general parliamentary election. The figure also shows a marked increase in reports of violence and torture which coincides with the launch of *Operation Murambatsvina* ('Restore Order') in May 2005⁶.

⁵ See for instance, *Zimbabwe - Tortuous Patterns Destined to Repeat Themselves in Upcoming Election Campaign: Preliminary study of trends and associations in the pattern of torture and organised violence in Zimbabwe, July 2001 - December 2003* (Harare: Redress Trust, November 2004), 28; *Zimbabwe - The Face of Torture and Organised Violence: Torture and Organised Violence in the run-up to the 31 March 2005 General Parliamentary Election* (Harare: Redress Trust, March 2005). For a comprehensive survey and analysis of Zimbabwe from the perspective of torture survivors see REDRESS: *Reparation for Torture: A Survey of the Law and Practice of Torture in 30 Countries: Zimbabwe Country Study*, London, March 2003: <http://www.redress.org/publications/Audit/Zimbabwe.pdf>.

⁶ See for instance, *Torture in Zimbabwe, Past and Present: Prevention, Punishment, Reparations?* (Harare: Redress & Amani Trust, June 2005).

3.4 Relationship between time of first incident and time of arrival in South Africa

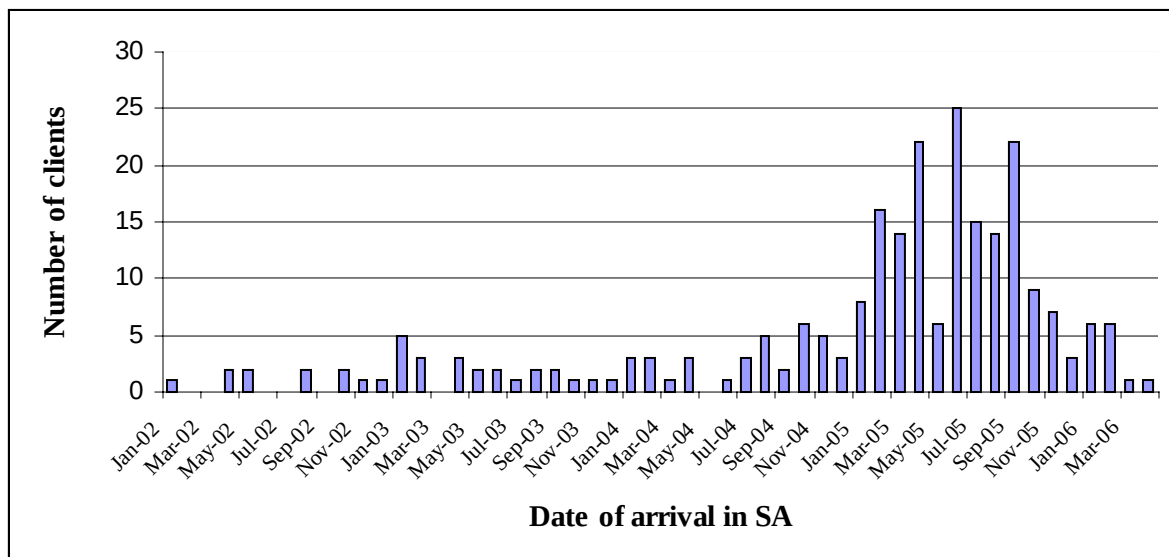


Figure 3: Date of arrival in South Africa, as reported by clients

Consistent with research by human rights organizations on the patterns of violence and human rights violations in Zimbabwe and their increases in the face of political events, Zimbabweans assisted by the ZTVP came into South Africa following important key political events in Zimbabwe. In particular, the figure above shows an increase in arrivals into South Africa in the months building up to the March 2005 general parliamentary election, peaking in July 2005 following the launch of *Operation Murambatsvina*.

Analysed in relation to their experiences of torture, the table below shows that almost two fifths of Zimbabweans (38%) arrived in South Africa within six months of their reported first incident of torture.

	N	%
Prior to first reported incident	12	5
Within 3 months of first reported incident	63	26
Within 4-6 months of first reported incident	28	12
Within 7-9 months of first reported incident	15	6
Within 10-12 months of first reported	19	8
Within 13-24 months of first reported	31	13
More than 2 years after first reported incident	75	31
Total	243	100

Table 4: Time of arrival in South Africa in relation to first reported torture incident

For this report details on subsequent experiences of organized violence and torture were not provided. However, the data show that 75% of Zimbabweans who took seven months or longer to arrive in South Africa (after their first torture incident) experienced additional incidents of torture beyond the first reported incident. In other words, it would seem that a number of Zimbabweans remained in Zimbabwe despite having experienced a first incident of torture and were later the subjects of additional incidents, including *Operation Murambatsvina* – a factor that illustrates the resilience of Zimbabweans against ongoing violence and an unwillingness to flee the country and undergo a massive disruption in their livelihoods. The findings would seem to suggest that ongoing attacks influenced Zimbabweans to make the difficult decision to eventually leave their countries.

3.5 Arrest and/or detention

	Female	Male	Total
Not arrested/detained	84%	68%	73% (N=195)
Arrested/detained	16%	32%	27% (N=72)
Total	100% (N=83)	100% (N=184)	100% (N=267)

Table 5: Experience of arrest and/or detention, by sex

Over a quarter of clients (27% or 72 clients) indicated that they had been arrested or detained. Male clients were statistically more likely to report having been arrested or detained in comparison to female clients. Moreover, clients who indicated that they had been politically active in Zimbabwe and those who were MDC members were the most likely to be subject to arrest or detention.

3.6 Forms of torture experienced by clients

In addition to being arrested or detained, clients were asked to describe their incidents of torture and to indicate whether they had experienced different forms of both physical and psychological torture in Zimbabwe. Forms of physical torture that clients were asked about include: beatings, sensory over stimulation, electric shock, falanga⁷, burnings, rape and indecent assault. In terms of psychological torture, clients were asked whether they experienced threats, harassment, witnessing of torture on others, as well as ‘psychological torture’ as an encompassing category inclusive of verbal abuse, false accusations, abuse with excrement and sexual abuse without violence. In this analysis, *Operation Murambatsvina*⁸ is included as a form of both physical and psychological torture, since it resulted in the physical assault and beating of individuals, in addition to having a devastating effect on the mental health of those affected.

3.6.1 Physical torture

Analysed together, 78% of ZTVP clients indicated that they had experienced some form of physical torture. The table below provides a detailed breakdown of the forms of torture experienced by clients.

	No. of mentions	% Yes ⁹
Beaten	191	72%
Sensory over stimulation	146	55%
Electric Shock	35	13%
<i>Operation Murambatsvina</i>	35	13%
Burnt	20	8%
Falanga	19	7%
Rape	12	5%
Indecent assault	11	4%
Total cases (N)	267	

Table 6: Reported forms of physical torture (N=267)

Almost three quarters of clients indicated that they had been beaten, while over half of all clients indicated that they had been exposed to sensory over stimulation including exposure to constant noises, screams and voices. Except for instances of rape, all other forms of torture described in the table above were significantly more likely to have taken place in cases where clients had been detained or arrested.

⁷ Falanga is the term for a form of torture that involves beating the soles of the feet. It is very common in many countries, but has not been common in Zimbabwe until recently. Falanga is important to note as it is incontestably torture, since the soles of the feet cannot be beaten without restraining the person, and hence is clearly deliberate and intentional as required by the definition of torture in the UN Convention Against Torture.

⁸ *Operation Murambatsvina* is analysed in this case as a “clinically significant disorder” that had a devastating effect on the mental health of those affected, as well as a form of physical torture. For a more detailed analysis of *Operation Murambatsvina*, please see: *An In-depth Study on the Impact of Operation Murambatsvina/Restore Order in Zimbabwe* (Harare: Action Aid International, November 2005).

⁹ Percentages do not add up to 100% because clients were allowed to mention more than one form of physical torture experienced.

3.6.2 Psychological torture

In addition to experiencing different physical forms of torture, all clients experienced psychological torture and specified the following forms of psychological torture.

	N	% ¹⁰
Psychological torture	218	82%
Threatened	212	79%
Witnessing	206	77%
Harassed	155	58%
Operation Murambatsvina	35	13%
Total cases (N)	267	

Table 7: Reported forms of psychological torture (N=267)

In particular, 82% of all clients indicated that they had been exposed to psychological torture in the form of verbal abuse, false accusations, abuse with excrement and sexual abuse without violence. Additionally, 79% of clients stated that they had experienced threats against their person, whilst 77% of clients witnessed violations being performed on others including assault, slapping, kicking; assault with rifle butts, sticks, whips and/or irons; hanging, suspension, electrical shock, rape, and/or falanga. Also included in witnessing are deliberate executions and disappearances of individuals.

As in the case with physical torture, clients who indicated that they had been arrested or detained were the most likely to state that they had experienced the different types of psychological torture outlined above.

3.7 Perpetrators of torture

Clients were asked to provide information about the individuals involved in inflicting torture. In a number of cases, more than one individual and/or state agent was involved. The findings from this study seem to corroborate previous findings which highlight that perpetrators of human rights violations in Zimbabwe tend to be overwhelmingly persons and structures under the control of the Mugabe government¹¹. The table below shows a breakdown of these entities.

¹⁰ Percentages do not add up to 100% because clients were allowed to mention more than one form of psychological torture experienced.

¹¹ See for instance, *Zimbabwe - Tortuous Patterns Destined to Repeat Themselves in Upcoming Election Campaign: Preliminary study of trends and associations in the pattern of torture and organised violence in Zimbabwe, July 2001 - December 2003* (Harare: Redress Trust, November 2004); *Zimbabwe - The Face of Torture and Organised Violence: Torture and Organised Violence in the run-up to the 31 March 2005 General Parliamentary Election* (Harare: Redress Trust, March 2005); *Torture in Zimbabwe, Past and Present: Prevention, Punishment, Reparations?* (Harare: Redress & Amani Trust, June 2005).

	N	%¹²
Zanu PF	120	45%
Police	71	27%
Zanu PF youth	58	22%
Activists	37	14%
War Veterans	30	11%
CIO	30	11%
Militia	23	9%
Army	15	6%
Green Bombers	12	5%
Military	4	2%
MDC	3	1%
Unknown	15	6%
Total cases	267	

Table 8: Reported perpetrators of torture

Not surprisingly, Zanu PF members were implicated in 45% of the reported cases, followed by members of the police (27% of cases), and Zanu PF youth (22% of cases). In a number of cases, activists, “war veterans”, Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) members, and members of the militia were also responsible for inflicting torture. Members of the MDC opposition movement represented only 1% of all perpetrators thus further corroborating previous findings which are skeptical of the contention that the violence in Zimbabwe is primarily a result of inter-party conflicts.

4 ASSESSING LEVELS OF TRAUMA AND ASSISTANCE PROVISION

4.1 Clinical assessment

As part of the clinical assessment of its clients, the ZTVP administers a Self Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ8), a widely-used psychiatric screening instrument developed in Zimbabwe, which investigates 8 common symptoms in the past week. The SRQ8 was derived from the Self-Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ-20) developed by the World Health Organization in 1980 to provide an instrument for reliably detecting non-psychotic mental disorders and used widely in Africa as well as in other developing countries. All scores of 4 or higher can be taken to be indicative of significant psychological disorder and in need of immediate assistance¹³.

¹² Percentages do not up to 100% because clients were allowed to give more than one answer to this question.

¹³ *An In-depth Study on the Impact of Operation Murambatsvina/Restore Order in Zimbabwe*, 13.

	N	%
Score of 0-3	45	19
Score of 4-5	64	27
Score of 6-8	132	55
Total	241	100

Table 9: Breakdown of SRQ8 scores

As shown in the table above, over three quarters of all clients assessed by the ZTVP obtained a score of 4 or higher, thus highlighting the gravity of their psychological disturbance and their need to receive immediate psychiatric assistance. Scores did not vary substantially based on the sex of the client.

However, as the table below shows, there were significant statistical differences in scores between those who indicated that they had been arrested or detained and those who did not.

	Score of 0-3	Score of 4+	Total
Not arrested/detained	24%	76%	100% (N=172)
Arrested/detained	6%	94%	100% (N=69)
Total	19% (N=45)	81% (N=196)	100% (N=241)

Table 10: SRQ8 scores in relation to experience of arrest/detention

In particular, the overwhelming majority of those arrested or detained (94%) had scores of 4 or higher, compared to 76% of those who were not arrested or detained. Higher SRQ8 scores amongst those arrested or detained would seem to suggest that being subject to arrest or detention exposes individuals to higher levels of violence and trauma. This was illustrated in an earlier section which showed that clients who had been arrested or detained were the most likely to have experienced either psychological or physical torture, or both.

4.2 Assistance provision to clients

Clients seen by the ZTVP were offered different kinds of assistance based on their clinical assessment. ZTVP refers clients for medical and psychosocial intervention to state or non-state institutions. Regardless of the form that the assistance took, clients whose scores were 4 or higher on the SRQ8 were the most likely to be prioritized for assistance. In particular, almost half of all clients (49% or 131 cases) were referred for psychiatric intervention and treatment. The majority of ZTVP clients were referred for counseling services. In addition, 10% of all clients (26 cases) were referred to participate in a healing workshop offered by the Tree of Life Project.

Over one third of clients (36% or 97 cases) were referred to medical practitioners for treatment for different kinds of ailments or problems directly as a result of the torture. Focusing on these clients, who were referred for specific medical treatment, almost one third of them (32% or 31 clients) experienced physical ailments involving pain in the

abdomen, knees, legs and shoulders. The overwhelming majority (89%) of clients who complained of physical ailments indicated that they had experienced physical forms of torture in Zimbabwe.

In addition to being referred for necessary and specialized treatment, some clients also received other forms of assistance from the ZTVP.

	N¹⁴	%
Food assistance	71	27%
Rent/Shelter	28	11%
Living expenses	21	8%
Total	267	

Table 11: Types of material assistance provided to clients

Over a quarter of all clients (27%) received assistance with food, whereas 11% were assisted with rent costs or to find a shelter. A small proportion of clients (8%) also received some assistance to cover living costs. In addition, a transportation allowance is provided to all ZTVP clients who access ZTVP services. In the face of limited resources, this assistance was limited to the most vulnerable clients, especially those whose scores on the SRQ8 were 4 or higher. These clients tended to be individuals who used to be employed in semi-skilled occupations whilst in Zimbabwe. As a result of the difficulties that Zimbabweans, whether migrants or asylum seekers, experience in securing employment in South Africa and in being able to apply their valuable skills, many of these individuals, despite their qualifications, have had to become reliant on handouts to ensure their basic livelihood.

5 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

As this brief report has shown, violence and torture are affecting the next generation of Zimbabweans and those who are at the prime of their lives. Young Zimbabweans in their 20s and 30s are being exposed to both physical and psychological torture, exemplified by the high scores on the SRQ8. In this regard, the findings from this brief report generally confirm previous findings by human rights organizations regarding the nature of the violence and torture in Zimbabwe, as well as the heavy involvement of government-related entities in the administration of torture.

Even though this report analyses a relatively small sample of Zimbabweans who are presently in South Africa, it is nonetheless indicative of the sorts of problems and difficulties that other Zimbabweans living in South Africa are likely to be experiencing, especially in the face of ongoing reports of violence and torture and increasing numbers of Zimbabweans claiming asylum in South Africa. In particular, the study highlights the numbers of people who are probably experiencing psychological/psychiatric disturbances but who are not receiving psychosocial support to cope with the trauma experienced.

¹⁴ Clients accessed more than 1 form of material assistance.

Keeping in mind the high levels of trauma that Zimbabweans are experiencing, and their founded bases for asylum claims, it is unacceptable that they are being exposed to greater levels of trauma by being unable to easily access the asylum determination procedure in South Africa or to access employment as a result of not being issued with official documents or with documents that are mostly unrecognized by employers and service providers. As the world commemorates World Refugee Day, it is imperative that the South African government be true to its human rights commitments, enshrined in its Constitution and international conventions to which it is signatory, and that it expedite access to the asylum determination procedure for Zimbabweans. To obey its own laws, South Africa should grant asylum to genuine cases of Zimbabwean torture victims. In doing so, the South African government should openly and publicly recognize that there is a political crisis in Zimbabwe, where thousands of Zimbabweans are becoming victims of organized violence and torture and seeking refuge in South Africa.

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UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

Zimbabwe Torture Victims/Survivors Project

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