



Media Release – 13 May 2008

**'A run-off election in Zimbabwe will not be possible without an immediate end to intimidation, violence and torture and the deployment of reliable international election observers.'**

*Media Statement by Archbishop Buti Tlhagale OMI, President of the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference.*

Out of concern for the people of Zimbabwe, the Bishops of the Catholic Church in Southern Africa appeals for international and regional pressure to end the systematic intimidation, violence and torture in Zimbabwe. The current environment is not conducive to free and fair run-off elections.

Cardinal Wilfrid Napier, Archbishop of Durban, and I visited Zimbabwe recently and were told first-hand accounts of systematic intimidation, violence and torture. The victims identified the perpetrators as agents of the Zimbabwe Armed Forces, the Police, the Central Intelligence Organization (C.I.O), War Veterans, Youth Militia and plain thugs.

These human rights abuses are visited not only on those who are thought to have voted for the opposition, but also on those who assisted the Election Process, such as Polling Officers.

This 'reign of terror' has seen many deaths, savage beatings and flight from family, homes and communities. Human dignity is intrinsic to every human being, regardless of political affiliation and must be respected. I call on all political parties to reign in their supporters and end this horror.

I question whether a 'free and fair' run-off election is possible unless there is a will to stop this violence.

International Election Observers should be deployed immediately to assess both the remote and immediate preparation for the run-off election.

I call on all Zimbabweans to remember the hope with which they entered the March elections so well expressed in the call by civil society in the document 'The Zimbabwe we want' and to do all in their power to restore Zimbabwe to its rightful place in the family of Nations.

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Archbishop of Johannesburg.

President of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC).

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