

Zimbabwe Soldiers Harass Villagers

Plumtree - August 12 2009 - Villagers in Tshitshi area in Plumtree have accused soldiers and members of the police Support Unit based at an army base in the area of harassing them for voting for the opposition MDC during the previous elections despite denials by President Robert Mugabe on Tuesday that army members have never been involved in political violence.

Mugabe rejected accusations that soldiers had committed abuses, either during last year's campaign and voting or more recently under the unity government. He lauded the military for keeping law and order.

"Allegations of gross abuses of human rights or failure to respect good governance have provided fodder for the West and its media," said Mugabe at a ceremony to honour the defence forces.

The soldiers and police who are based at Matsiloji, the boarder between Zimbabwe and Botswana have been causing havoc in the area since June last year.

"During the run up to last year's elections the soldiers and the Support Unit set up a mini base at Tshitshi which was used to torture suspected opposition supporters. The base has not been dismantled since that time and the soldiers are still harassing us," said Mavis Ncube, the councilor for the area.

The soldiers have also been accused of harassing workers for non governmental organizations operating in the area whom they blame for Zanu PF's defeat during the elections.

One of the relief organizations which operates in the area has already launched a formal complaint with the police in Bulawayo.

“We have already approached the officer Commanding Support Unit in Bulawayo who has promised to address our concerns. During the meeting we all agreed that the base should be now dismantled since it has “served its purpose” said an official of the organisation, who refused to be named for fear of victimization.

Last week the soldiers disrupted a meeting organized by a local non governmental organizations operating in the area.

“We were having a meeting with community leaders at St Francis secondary school when the soldiers who were apparently drunk stormed into the meeting and demanded to be included in the programme. This people have really become a problem here,” said a worker of another non governmental organization who also refused to be named for fear of victimization.

The soldiers have also been accused of impregnating school children in the area.

The soldiers have been accused of confiscating boarder jumpers goods and exchanging the items with goats and chickens with the local villagers.

“The fact is that most of our husbands and relatives work in Botswana. They occasionally bring us groceries and other things. It is when they are bringing those groceries that they are raided by the soldiers. In most cases most of the people have evidence to prove that they applied for their passports.

Besides that we have got lots of relative across,” said Jane Ndlovu.

When reached for a comment an army officer working in the army’s Public

Relations Department who only identified himself as Captain Tsatse said
“We have not received any of the reports which you are talking. What I
know is that we have soldiers in Plumtree who are guarding our boarder
with Botswana.”