



**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**

WOZA, Zimbabwe, Freedom of Expression and Association, HRD

Amnesty International has been working with and for human rights defenders since its inception. We use our global membership network and profile to ensure that the voices of smaller local organizations are heard. Many times, bringing attention to the works of small groups also helps to protect the safety of their activists. Zimbabwean human rights organization WOZA is one example. Through simple actions, our members helped to protect WOZA activists from police ill-treatment and give them the courage and strength to continue their struggle.

Since February 2003, members of the human rights organization WOZA (Women of Zimbabwe Arise) have been repeatedly arrested by the Zimbabwean police while taking part in peaceful demonstration against the worsening social, economic, and human rights situation in the country.

While in detention, the women are held in poor and overcrowded conditions, for periods ranging from a few hours to several days. WOZA activists have been threatened and assaulted by police officers, who have also obstructed their access to lawyers.

Many of those arrested are usually released without charge, but some have been charged under repressive legislation, such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA), which gives the police sweeping powers that they have used to intimidate and detain real or perceived opponents of the government, including human rights activists. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Zimbabweans have been arbitrarily arrested under POSA since 2002.

WOZA's co-founder, human rights defender Jenni Williams, told Amnesty International in January 2009 that she had been arrested 33 times. In September 2010, she was again arrested after greeting activists who had just been released from prison. She is accused of "addressing a gathering".

Amnesty International members have been campaigning long and hard in support of WOZA activists. Though the pressure has not yet ended the suppression of rights, it has certainly helped the way police treat activists during arrests and in detention. When arrests happen, our members write and call the police stations where the women are held, urging the police to release them. WOZA activists are known to have been told by police "to tell your Amnesty friends that we did not ill treat you".

"Phoning the police, faxing a protest, signing a postcard - all these things make a difference because they send a clear message", says Jenni Williams of actions taken by Amnesty International members. **"I believe that the phone calls to the police in Zimbabwe during my arrest saved me from torture and rape... the police station was so swamped with calls that they stopped picking up the phone."**

The continuing support and solidarity have made another significant difference – it makes WOZA activists feel that they are not alone, giving them the courage and strength to continue their struggle.

“Amnesty International is our big sister”, says Jenni Williams. “When I’m in prison, if I know that someone, my big sister, is shouting for me, telling people about me, then I feel less distressed, less frightened and less alone. When we began as WOZA as a non-violent civil disobedience movement, people thought we were crazy, civil society didn’t want to engage at all before Amnesty International started writing about us. It helped us arrive as human rights defenders.”

Audiovisual Resources:

[Stories of Success / Woza - Pictures on ADAM](#)