

A 'discredited' judge? – Letter to the UK Home Secretary

Written by Administrator
Sunday, 08 March 2015 14:14 -

To: Ms Theresa May

Secretary of State for the Home Department

2 Marsham Street SW1P 4DF

Dear Ms May

The Zimbabwe Vigil wishes to protest at being described as a 'discredited' organisation by Judge Ford at a recent immigration tribunal hearing involving one of our supporters, Epiphania Phiri.

The Vigil wrote a letter in support of Ms Phiri's asylum claim as it is prepared to do for all who fulfil our requirements of a sufficient number of attendances and give us no reason to doubt their commitment.

In her decision rejecting Ms Phiri's appeal against deportation, Judge of the First –Tier Ford

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said (paragraph 55): *But the Zim Vigil and the associated ROHR have been discredited as organisations that either deliberately has allowed individuals seeking to fabricate an asylum claim based on their political beliefs, to use evidence of Zim Vigil attendance and activities to bolster their claim or alternatively, has not sought to verify the credentials of those involved in the activities of Zim Vigil and ROHR, so as to ensure that those who claim to support them are genuine supporters motivated by a genuine interest in the promotion of human rights and freedoms in Zimbabwe.*

The Vigil emphatically rejects the suggestion that it 'deliberately' helps people 'fabricate' as asylum claim. We think this is a totally unjustified comment.

We would also point out that there is no way we can 'verify the credentials' of all those attending the Vigil, many of them people in difficult circumstances dispersed around the country. We are a human rights group with limited means and not a charity or an asylum organisation, let alone a detective agency.

We stand by everything we say in our support letter and you will find below the text of the current version.

You will note the disclaimer at the top mentioning misconceptions about the Vigil held by some Home Office case workers. We have over the years received two apologies from the Home Office for the type of unsubstantiated slur on the Vigil made by Judge Ford (for letter of

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18/7/2011, see: <http://www.zimvigil.co.uk/vigil-news/campaign-news/323-text-of-letter-from-ukba-to-the-zimbabwe-vigil>
and for letter of 30/6/2014, see:
<http://www.zimvigil.co.uk/vigil-news/campaign-news/599-letter-from-uk-visas-and-immigration--30062014>
).

We accept that we may not be privy to all the details of the history of the people we write letters for. All we can write about is how their current involvement with us meets our threshold for political activism that could put them at risk if they were returned home.

Zimbabwe Vigil Co-ordinators

Text of Vigil letter

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER: It has come to our attention that some asylum tribunal judges and UKBA officials have misconceptions about the Vigil. Misinformation from Zimbabwe media sites has been used by UKBA officials to discredit the authenticity of Vigil letters – please check: <http://www.zimvigil.co.uk/vigil-news/campaign-news/323-text-of-letter-from-ukba-to-the-zimbabwe-vigil>

for text of letter from UKBA confirming this information should not be used in this way. The Vigil does not issue membership cards. Our supporters sign a register weekly and we log this

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information on our attendance database.

Our flickr photo website is password protected and photos can only be uploaded by Vigil personnel. We do not charge for letters we write for our supporters but usually ask for a small (£10) administration fee to cover our costs

*I'm writing this letter on behalf of ***, a supporter of the Zimbabwe Vigil. The Vigil has been demonstrating outside the Zimbabwe Embassy in London every Saturday since October 2002 in protest at human rights violations in Zimbabwe and in support of free and fair elections (see our website). As usual, the last elections on 31st July 2013 were comprehensively rigged to return Mugabe to power (see: 'Not credible: Zimbabwe's 2013 election results marred by fraud' – <http://www.sokwanele.com/zimbabwe-elections/evidence-of-fraud>).*

*Supporters such as *** help draw attention to the plight of Zimbabwe by engaging passers-by and taking part in protest singing and dancing. Some years ago the Observer newspaper described us as the largest regular demonstration in London.*

The Vigil accepts the right of the UK to send home failed asylum seekers but trust that the UKBA will continue to grant protection to those Zimbabweans who need it. We believe that it is not safe to send home Zimbabweans who are known human rights activists.

In August 2011 a BBC report said Zimbabwe was sending spies to the UK to spy on the refugee community (http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/aug27_2011.html#Z10). The Vigil has long known this. In July 2010 one of our supporters returned home on a visit. He was identified as a Vigil supporter and arrested, beaten up and tortured.

He would still be there if it hadn't been for our efforts to get him legal help and escape from Zimbabwe. (See Vigil diaries of 31/07/2010: <http://www.zimvigil.co.uk/the-vigil-diary/246-zimbabwe-vigil-diary-31st-july-2010>, 07/08/2010: <http://www.zimvigil.co.uk/the-vigil-diary/247-zimbabwe-vigil-diary-7th-august-2010>).

This incident shows that activism in the UK and attendance at the Vigil increases the risk of being known by the forces within Zimbabwe that still perpetrate violence against Mugabe opponents. We are a high-profile protest that has been under constant surveillance by intelligence operatives of the regime. Our supporters are those who care enough about the human rights abuses in their country to attend our protests. Many of them make a considerable effort in terms of cost and long hours travelling to come because they see the right of freedom to protest, which is denied to those back home, as important in the campaign against human rights abuses in Zimbabwe.

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Our supporters are easy to identify because pictures of the Vigil are widely available on the internet and can be accessed by the Zimbabwe Central Intelligence Organisation. This was demonstrated when a photo of one of our supporters appeared in the newspaper the Zimbabwean. Within days his family home in Zimbabwe was raided by the police who spoke angrily about Zimbabweans in the UK (<http://www.zimvigil.co.uk/the-vigil-diary/181-zimbabwe-vigil-diary-22nd-august-2009>). More recently, the funeral of the mother of a member of the Vigil management team was disrupted by Mugabe's Zanu PF members because of his involvement with the Vigil (<http://www.zimvigil.co.uk/the-vigil-diary/312-voice-of-british-caribbeans-ashamed-of-mugabe-zimbabwe-vigil-diary-4th-june-2011>).

In November 2014 a whistle-blower at Harare International Airport warned people returning home to be careful, especially if they had been involved in pro-democracy activities abroad. You can see his chilling report on this weblink: <http://newzimbabwe.com/news-18903-Airport+staff+er's+chilling+warning+for+exiles/news.aspx>

The Zimbabwe Vigil looks forward to a time when all exiled Zimbabweans can return home in safety to rebuild our country but, following the latest rigged elections, we have little hope of an improvement in the human rights situation in the immediate future.

Zimbabwe Vigil Co-ordinator