

# Women of Zimbabwe Arise

## 'The Power of Love can conquer the Love of Power'



*WOZA women show their iconic 'love' sign, 2004*

In **February 2011**, WOZA staged its ninth annual Valentine's Day peaceful protest. Amnesty put out an Urgent Action when Jenni and Magodonga were forced to go into hiding after police searches for the pair, and 10 activists were charged. While detained some were tortured to force them to reveal the whereabouts of Jenni and Magodonga.

Charges were dropped on **May 10**, the detained released and Jenni and Magodonga came out of hiding. Sadly that same day the police beat 40 WOZA activists taking part in protest poor services and the high price of electricity.

*"I am alive today, after 33 arrests, because members of Amnesty International spoke out for me" - Jenni Williams*

*(See other side for latest update)*



*Leaders Magodonga Mahlangu and Jenni Williams,*

Since February 2003, women belonging to the women's rights organisation Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) have repeatedly been arrested by the Zimbabwe police while taking part in peaceful demonstrations to protest the worsening social, economic and human rights situation in the country. In 2006 Men of Zimbabwe Arise (MOZA) was formed as a brother organisation under the WOZA banner.

WOZA members have been arrested numerous times for taking part in peaceful protests against the worsening economic, social and human rights situation in Zimbabwe. WOZA activists have been verbally and physically abused in police custody and denied access to lawyers, food and water.

Babies and young children have been detained with their mothers, sometimes overnight in police cells. Together they have faced intimidation, harassment, and ill-treatment by police officers. Many of those arrested have later been released without charge, but some have been charged under repressive legislation such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Miscellaneous Offences Act (MOA).



*WOZA activists joining their hands in prayer. They were arrested shortly afterwards.*

The treatment of WOZA and MOZA members illustrates the government's increasing intolerance of peaceful public demonstrations expressing criticism of government policies. It also highlights the malicious use of the law, particularly the combination of the Public Order and Security Act and Miscellaneous Offences Act, to allow arbitrary arrests and detentions, which allow for a range of other human rights violations by the police.

**There have been many other occasions where members have been treated unfairly for expressing themselves.**

They have done nothing more than take part in peaceful demonstrations.

In May 2006, 185 people were arrested in Zimbabwe following a peaceful march organised by WOZA. They were protesting against the government increase in school fees by 1000%. Those reportedly arrested included eight mothers with infants, and 73 children under the age of 18. Some were charged under Section 7c of the Miscellaneous Offences Act with behaviour which is "likely to materially interfere with the ordinary comfort, convenience, peace or quiet of the public". Or quiet of the public." Lawyers took the case to court, however, the prosecutor refused to proceed with the charges because the police could not provide evidence. Women charged, some of whom were elderly, were in pain from having to lie on concrete floors and access to painkillers and blankets was denied.

In 2005 approximately 260 women were arrested when WOZA attempted to hold a peaceful post-election prayer vigil. They were taken to Harare Central Police Station. Several women were reportedly beaten and at least three were seriously injured. None were given access to adequate medical treatment.

Also in 2005 approximately 50 women were arrested in Zimbabwe after a demonstration to mark Valentine's Day in which they handed out roses to the public. While in custody, the women were threatened by police officers and denied food.



Valentine's Day demonstration, Harare, 14 February 2007 ©WOZA.



Valentine's day demonstration in 2007; Children and women beaten

In **April 2011**, police raided a property at which some WOZA members had gathered. Luckily members were able to leave the property through a rear entrance moments before the police broke the gate.

The tenant of the property was not so lucky. When he arrived at the scene he was beaten by police, and the property was kept under armed police guard for 11 days. No explanation was given and the Police only left when a High Court judge ruled they must vacate the property.

When Police were served with the court application by WOZA's lawyer, one officer stated that he would 'deal personally with [WOZA leader] Jenni Williams', and throughout the occupation Police had demanded that Jenni present herself, which sparks fears that she may be at risk of arbitrary arrest.

