

Detained Zimbabwe activists 'severely tortured', says lawyer

Written by reporter

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Seven Zimbabwean opposition activists accused in a series of bombings have been "severely tortured" by state security agents, their lawyer told a court Wednesday, urging a probe into the alleged abuse.

The activists include the director of security for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), as well as a former adviser to party leader Morgan Tsvangirai.

"From November 20, they were severely tortured while in police custody and and some of them were denied critical medication," lawyer Alec Muchadehama told a magistrate's court.

"No arrest took place. Each one of them is a victim of abduction and forced disappearance by state agents. None of them was arrested in terms of the law," he said.

"What we are seeking is that the court must urge the state to investigate the allegations of torture and report on the next remand date. If nothing happens we reserve the right to approach international courts for redress." The accused were among 18 opposition and rights activists taken from their homes in separate incidents since October and detained at unknown locations.

They only began appearing in court on December 24, and stand accused of bombing two police stations in Harare as well as two bridges outside the capital "for the purposes of causing insurrection in Zimbabwe." They denied the charges.

Doctors who examined them at Chikurubi maximum security prison, where they are detained, said they suffered various injuries. One appeared to have damaged kidneys and required urgent medical treatment, the doctors said.

Another risked becoming deaf without urgent treatment for a ruptured membrane in one ear, while a third was psychologically traumatised and had developed a fear of water and open spaces.

The arrest of the activists has heightened fears for a September power-sharing deal signed by Tsvangirai and President Robert Mugabe, which has stalled over disputes about dividing control

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of key cabinet posts.

The hearing continues Thursday.