In Focus: Torture, rape, disappearances 'rampant' in Zimbabwe

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Members of the UK-based Zimbabwe Vigil have been demonstrating against human rights abuses in Zimbabwe every Saturday for the past 13 years. IBTimes UK spoke with some of the organisers about the regime of fear implemented by President Robert Mugabe and the urgent need to help Zimbabweans achieve democracy and freedom.

Ephraim Tapa, a member of the Vigil and chairman of Restoration of Human Rights (ROHR) Zimbabwe and Zimbabwe Yes We Can, was allegedly abducted and tortured in 2002. He warned that the situation in the country has not changed since he left, following his release.

In March, Itai Dzamara, the head of the Occupy Africa Unity Square campaign, who publicly criticised Mugabe and urged him to resign, was abducted by five men from a barber shop in Zimbabwe's capital, Harare. The state denied any involvement with Dzamara's disappearance, which [prompted protests](http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/zimbabwe-clashes-over-abduction-mugabe-critic-itai-dzamara-harare-1491620) in the country. He is still missing, and his supporters and family fear he has been killed.

Several NGOs including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (HRW) have warned that Mugabe continues to violate human rights, despite the implementation of a new constitution in 2013. The document guarantees, among other things, freedom of speech, freedom of association, rights for LGBT people and the creation of a [Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC).](http://www.zhrc.org.zw/)

The Commission, however, is allegedly not functioning properly due to lack of funds and staff, [according to HRW,](https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/zimbabwe) because it cannot investigate on alleged human rights abuses that occurred prior to to 2009.

[Zimbabwe Vigil](http://www.zimvigil.co.uk/) has also warned that [internally displaced people](http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/zimbabwe-government-deny-food-aid-20000-displaced-people-who-refuse-forced-labour-1448737) are in urgent need of adequate assistance by the government.

Although he is accused of having ordered massacres, undermining democracy and crushing political opponents, Mugabe has been Zimbabwe's head of state for 35 years. He won the 2013 presidential election with 61% of votes, and the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon praising him for having prevented violence during the election.