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## **International Rights Body Deplores Silence**

By Staff Reporter

HARARE — An international human rights group has expressed shock at rights abuses by state agents in Zimbabwe and deplored the failure by neighboring countries and international rights groups to pressure Harare to stop the violations.

"We are concerned, shocked and alarmed at the impact of repressive laws and at the severe human rights abuses by state agents that have resulted in deepening poverty, torture and rape," representatives of the World Alliance for Citizen Participation, said in a communique obtained by AFP on Saturday.

The seven representatives of rights groups from Africa were in Zimbabwe for a four-day mission last week.

"Despite the frequent human rights abuses by the government of Zimbabwe on its people, there has been insignificant intervention from governments and civil society in the region and beyond," the team said in the two-page communique.

They called on President Robert Mugabe's government to repeal repressive laws including the stiff media and security laws which critics say have been invoked to suppress the opposition and emasculate a once-vibrant private press.

They deplored the failure by the authorities to build shelter for victims of a government crackdown on slums in May last year and called for an independent rights commission to bring perpetrators of human rights abuses to account.

Zimbabwe has come under a barrage of criticism for its rights record tainted by allegations of attacks and detentions of perceived enemies of the state.

Last year the Zimbabwe government drew international condemnation when it launched an anti-slum drive which left hundreds of thousands homeless and others without means of survival.

In September several trade unionists suffered fractures as riot police crushed protests against the skyrocketing cost of living and general economic mismanagement.

The New York-based Human Rights Watch said in a report in October the Zimbabwean government had intensified its use of torture and arbitrary arrests to quell opposition to Mugabe's 26-year-rule.

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