

**Refugee Review Tribunal  
AUSTRALIA**

**RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE**

**Research Response Number:** ZWE31731  
**Country:** Zimbabwe  
**Date:** 3 May 2007

Keywords: Zimbabwe – National Service – Exit procedures – Passports

This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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**Questions**

1. Can you provide detail on how the National Service system operates, how they recruit etc?
2. Can you provide information on ability to depart Zimbabwe if the authorities have an adverse interest in you? Is there a black list for example and would you be refused a passport?

**RESPONSE**

1. Can you provide detail on how the National Service system operates, how they recruit etc?

The national service system in Zimbabwe is the National Youth Service training programme. This scheme was announced in 2000 and began operation in 2001. Recruits to the National Youth Service do not serve in the army, but undertake paramilitary training in rural camps around Zimbabwe, where they are known as “youth militias”. A 2003 report on the National Youth Service is attached (The Solidarity Peace Trust 2003, *National youth service training – “shaping youths in a truly Zimbabwean manner”*: An overview of youth militia training and activities in Zimbabwe, October 2000 – August 2003, September [http://www.solidaritypeacetrust.org/reports/youth\\_militia.pdf](http://www.solidaritypeacetrust.org/reports/youth_militia.pdf) – Accessed 30 April 2007 – Attachment 1). This report notes the following:

- The need for national service was never formally debated in Parliament and there is no legislation controlling its implementation. (pp.9, 20) It was approved by the Zimbabwe cabinet in 2000, but not put before parliament. (p.20)
- The policy was announced in October 2000 by Border Gezi, Minister of Youth, Gender and Employment Creation. (p.12) and training intakes commenced in August 2001. (p.14)
- The scheme is open to youth aged from 10 to 30 years. (p.13)

- The aim of the scheme was to provide skills, patriotism and moral education (pp.9-13), but later it was expanded to provide military training. (pp.12-15)
- It has been announced that the scheme is compulsory for all school leavers, but in 2003 there were only resources to train a fraction (7%) of all school leavers. (pp.18-20) The report states:

What has become apparent through discussions with those who have completed the training, is that a sizeable number were coerced into the training, and that the training and activities during deployment have deeply traumatised the youth militia themselves.

Others entered the training voluntarily, either because their parents are staunch ZANU-PF supporters who wanted them to do so, or because they believed the rhetoric that promised them skills training and jobs at the end of such training. (p.48)

- The government has made completion of National Youth Service a prerequisite for tertiary study and government employment (although it is not clear whether this has been fully implemented). (pp.19-20) Many militia are recruited into the Zimbabwe Army. (p.21)
- The training camps teach a ZANU-PF view of Zimbabwean history and society which vilifies the MDC. (pp.9,16-18)
- Members of the National Youth Service form “youth militias” which have been used to attack opponents of ZANU-PF, such as MDC supporters. The youth militias have been responsible for a large number of human rights abuses. (pp.9-10, 23-38)
- Those undertaking National Youth Service have in some cases been subject to abuse and rape and many are traumatised by the activities they are asked to undertake. (pp.10, 42, 48-51)

The UK Home Office’s most recent report on Zimbabwe includes a number of excerpts of reports on the National Youth Service:

11.66 “The National Youth Service programme was established in 2001 and is ostensibly a post-school ideological and vocational training scheme for those who are seeking to enter further education or government service. While initial proposals were for a compulsory programme for all Zimbabwean youth, experience over the first four years demonstrated capacity at five residential camps for just 6,000 youths per year, or about 2 per cent of each age group.

“Critics of the scheme say that the training camps are effectively ZANU-PF indoctrination facilities aiming to brutalise and co-opt a new generation of supporters for the ruling party and its third phase of the ‘liberation struggle’, replacing ZANLA veterans lost to age and HIV/AIDS. It is alleged that cadres, nicknamed ‘Green Bombers’ or ZANU-PF Youth Militia, are trained in torture and intimidation techniques before being unleashed back into the community to inform on and combat opposition activists. Female cadres have complained that rape is used as a standard method of breaking in new recruits. Training is certainly paramilitary in style, with uniforms and weapons handling.” (Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment – Zimbabwe) **[111b] (p73)**

11.67 “Since its introduction in 2001, the National Youth Services ideological and

paramilitary training programme has also become a major tool for political repression and has radicalised and brutalised a new generation of Zimbabweans in the 'Third Chimuranga' (revived liberation struggle). This is considered particularly important given the ageing of ZANU-PF's 'liberation generation' leadership, the loss of so many veterans to AIDS, and the MDC's domination of the labour movement." (Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment – Zimbabwe) [111b] (p12)

11.68 A report published by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) on 31 May 2006 noted that with "...new recruits to the military now coming from Mugabe's hated youth militia, there is little hope that the military will become an impartial body in the near future. The militia training camps, which have been in existence since 2001, are places where school leavers are imbued with 'patriotic values' as defined by the ruling party. Graduates from these camps, known as Green Bombers from their distinctive olive green uniforms, have been used to terrorise government opponents at successive elections." [77h] A report by the IWPR on 21 March 2006 noted that youths continue to be "... recruited into National Youth Service camps where they are pumped with anti-opposition propaganda and pro-ZANU PF patriotic messages, before serving in militias deployed to village areas to support ruling party officials." [77n]

11.69 ZimOnline reported on 1 August 2006 that the government had decided to deploy the ZANU-PF Youth Militia at the country's border posts as part of a drive to reduce travellers leaving the country with over the allowed limit of cash. The move, which was announced by the Governor of Zimbabwe's central bank, is part of a package to try to stabilise the economy. [49ao]

11.70 According to a report from ZBC Radio 3 on 24 November 2001, in 2001 the Government established the Border Gezi National Youth Training Centre in Mount Darwin, Mashonland. Named after the former Minister for Youth, the training centre was the first in the country. National Youth Service (NYS) was reported to last for three months and entail self-defence, patriotism and entrepreneurial skills, amongst others. [37h] However, reports in the *Financial Gazette* of 6 June 2002 claimed that youths had been used to terrorise the political opposition. These same youths had since admitted that they only received military training. In this respect, claims have been made that the NYS scheme was only a ploy, its real purpose was as a front to mobilise ZANU-PF youths to campaign for the party. [37h]

11.71 The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum's report entitled 'Zimbabwe – Facts and Fictions', published in November 2005, noted that "The programme and activities of the youth militia seem to have declined, probably more out of budgetary constraints as opposed to a response to the recommendation of the ACHPR [African Commission on Human and People's Rights]. Youth camps have not closed down as recommended by the ACHPR, but they have decreased in number especially after the 2002 presidential elections." [35y] (p37)

### **Compulsory service**

11.72 The *Financial Gazette* reported on 6 June 2002, that the Government had stated that NYS would be compulsory for those who sought to enter tertiary training and, as of February 2002, enter college or university. [37h] The Solidarity Peace trust noted on 5 September 2003 that, Samuel Mumbengegwi, the Minister for Higher Education and Technology, further announced that no student would be given their "O" or "A" level certificates until they had completed six months of NYS. Tertiary education centres were told in November 2002 not to send letters of admission to ordinary applicants until the institution had received a list of militia, who would be

given priority. The Minister admitted that this would result in many tertiary places remaining unfilled as students went through the militia training before going to tertiary institutions. NYS was already a prerequisite for entry into the civil service, including teaching and nursing. [65a] However the USSD 2004 appears to indicate that a diploma from a National Youth Service training camp was not always needed to access higher education/government employment. “The Government sometimes ordered that students entering college, teacher training schools, or the civil service must present a diploma from one of the National Youth Service training camps.” [2a] (Section 5)

11.73 The US State Department Report on Human Rights Practices 2005 (USSD 2005), published on 8 March 2006, stated that “There were reports that the government removed from the civil service and the military persons who were perceived as opposition supporters. Additionally, there were reports that the government assigned soldiers and graduates of ZANU-PF’s national youth service training centers to work in government ministries.” [2h] (Section 3)

11.74 The USSD 2005 report also noted that:

“The government gave preference to national youth service graduates among those entering and those seeking employment in the civil service, especially in the security forces. In May the government announced its intention to make national service compulsory for all students, starting in primary school, but there were no reports that the government implemented this requirement. The stated purpose of the training camps was to instil national pride in the youths, highlight the history of the struggle for independence, and develop employment skills; however, news reports quoted deserters as saying that the camps subjected trainees to racist and partisan political indoctrination and military training. There were credible reports that graduates were used for political violence. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of rape at the government’s national youth service training camps.” [2h] (Section 5)

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## **Recruitment**

11.77 The Solidarity Peace Trust report also stated that many of the youths joined the militia voluntarily. Some came from families who were “staunch ZANU-PF supporters”. The Trust maintained that others joined because of the skills that were supposedly taught during training. With limited prospects and the economy in decline many may have joined, as it was the only avenue for progression in the fields of employment and education. But it appeared that a sizeable number were coerced into joining the militia. Of those who were coerced, some were kidnapped into the service, whilst others were threatened that their families would suffer consequences if they did not. [65a]

11.78 ZimOnline reported on 14 June 2005 that “well placed sources” had told ZimOnline that the Zimbabwean government was planning to press gang street children into joining the government youth militia. The article noted that “Mugabe and his cabinet approved the plan in March (2005) but it could not take off because there was no money for the unbudgeted conscription programme, the sources said”. ZimOnline reported that two government ministers had confirmed that the plans to draft street children were still on the cards. [49f]  
(UK Home Office 2007, *Country of Origin Information Report: Zimbabwe*, 21 February – Attachment 2)

The UK Home Office report also comments on the lack of regular military service:

12.01 The *Zimbabwe Independent* reported on 23 January 2004 that the Constitution does not mention conscription and leaves it to parliament to fix the conditions of service in the armed forces. [21] Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment –Zimbabwe (Armed Forces, date posted: 22 March 2005), noted that Zimbabwe does not have conscription but that plans to re-introduce some form of compulsory military service were announced in 2000. "In August 2001 a national service intake was due to be introduced for the first time since majority rule in 1980. However, as presently construed, national service will only serve as a political introduction for employment in government service, be it the civil service or a military career." [111b] (p92)

(UK Home Office 2007, *Country of Origin Information Report: Zimbabwe*, 21 February – Attachment 2).

Please see the following attachments for further information:

- Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2006, *ZWE101401.E: 'Zimbabwe: The National Youth Service (NYS) training program; the type of training involved; age of participants; whether the training program is mandatory; whether there are exemptions; and the penalty for refusing to serve or for desertion (2001 – 2006)'*, 22 June – Attachment 3.
- Marwezu, Regeai 2007, 'Mugabe mobilises militia ahead of elections', Zimonline.com, 24 April <http://www.zimonline.co.za/Article.aspx?ArticleId=1270> – Accessed 2 May 2007 – Attachment 4.
- 'Zimbabwe: Brainwashing camp awaits Harare journalists' 2006, *Independent Online* (IOL), 29 November – Attachment 5.
- Smith, Richard 2005, 'Fear, Terror and the spoils of power – youth militias in Zimbabwe', *Ceasefire Anti-war News*, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 1 March <http://www.csvr.org.za/articles/artsmi2.htm> – Accessed 2 May 2007 – Attachment 6.
- War Resisters' International 1998, *Refusing to Bear Arms: A worldwide survey of conscription and conscientious objection to military service – Zimbabwe*, 10 August <http://www.wri-irg.org/co/rtba/zimbabwe.htm> – Accessed 30 April 2007 – Attachment 7).

**2. Can you provide information on ability to depart Zimbabwe if the authorities have an adverse interest in you? Is there a black list for example and would you be refused a passport?**

These questions are dealt with in RRT Research Response ZIM31566 which is attached (RRT Country Research 2007, *Research Response ZIM31566*, 28 March – Attachment 8).

**List of Sources Consulted**

Internet Sources:

**Government Information & Reports**

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada [http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/cgi-bin/foliocgi.exe/refinfo\\_e](http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/cgi-bin/foliocgi.exe/refinfo_e)

UK Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

US Department of State <http://www.state.gov/>

### **United Nations (UN)**

UNHCR <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>

### **Non-Government Organisations**

Amnesty International <http://www.amnesty.org/>

Human Rights Watch <http://www.hrw.org/>

### **International News & Politics**

afrol News <http://www.afrol.com/>

allAfrica.com <http://allafrica.com/>

Guardian <http://www.guardian.co.uk/>

IOL <http://www.int.iol.co.za/>

IRIN <http://www.irinnews.org/>

New Zimbabwe <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/>

SABC News <http://www.sabcnews.com/>

Telegraph <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/>

Zimbabwe Situation <http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/>

### **Search Engines**

Google <http://www.google.com.au/>

### **Databases:**

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIMA Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue

### **List of Attachments**

1. The Solidarity Peace Trust 2003, *National youth service training – “shaping youths in a truly Zimbabwean manner”: An overview of youth militia training and activities in Zimbabwe, October 2000 – August 2003*, September [www.sokwanele.com/pdfs/Youthmilitiasep2003.pdf](http://www.sokwanele.com/pdfs/Youthmilitiasep2003.pdf) also [http://www.solidaritypeacetrust.org/reports/youth\\_militia.pdf](http://www.solidaritypeacetrust.org/reports/youth_militia.pdf) – Accessed 30 April 2007.
2. UK Home Office 2007, *Country of Origin Information Report: Zimbabwe*, 21 February.
3. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2006, ZWE101401.E: ‘Zimbabwe: The National Youth Service (NYS) training program; the type of training involved; age of participants; whether the training program is mandatory; whether there are exemptions; and the penalty for refusing to serve or for desertion (2001 – 2006)’, 22 June [http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index\\_e.htm?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=450310](http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index_e.htm?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=450310) – Accessed 2 May 2007.
4. Marwezu, Regerai 2007, ‘Mugabe mobilises militia ahead of elections’, Zimonline.com, 24 April <http://www.zimonline.co.za/Article.aspx?ArticleId=1270> – Accessed 2 May 2007.

5. 'Zimbabwe: Brainwashing camp awaits Harare journalists' 2006, *Independent Online* (IOL), 29 November. (CISNET 'Zimbabwe' CX172664)
6. Smith, Richard 2005, 'Fear, Terror and the spoils of power – youth militias in Zimbabwe', *Ceasefire Anti-war News*, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 1 March <http://www.csvr.org.za/articles/artsmi2.htm> – Accessed 2 May 2007.
7. War Resisters' International 1998, *Refusing to Bear Arms: A worldwide survey of conscription and conscientious objection to military service – Zimbabwe*, 10 August <http://www.wri-irg.org/co/rtba/zimbabwe.htm> – Accessed 30 April 2007.
8. RRT Country Research 2007, *Research Response ZIM31566*, 28 March.