

## Stop Human Rights Abuses To Rejoin the Commonwealth: UK to ED

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Baroness Kate Hoey

British Commonwealth Minister Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon says Zimbabwe will only be accepted back into the Commonwealth if it ends political persecution and respects the rule of law.

In response to questions in the House of Lords on Tuesday, the minister said the UK remained concerned about the political situation in Zimbabwe, a former British colony.

He answered questions about the continued detention of MDC Alliance youth activist Makomborero Haruzivishe and the mounting political persecution in Zimbabwe.

“Gentlemen, what country does the government think has the power to effectively pressure Zimbabwe for political repression? We are likely to have less influence than China, which is unlikely to exert such pressure,” asked Lord Anderson of Swansea.

“Zimbabwe’s behavior is clearly tarnishing the image of the entire region. Is this recognized by its neighbours, especially South Africa, and do they play a positive role in this? “

In response, the Commonwealth Minister said that South Africa also wants Zimbabwe to be progressive and inclusive.

“My Lords, the short answer to the last question from the noble lord is that we are very committed to South Africa and yes, that it wants to see a progressive, inclusive Zimbabwe as part of the region and the world.

“Zimbabwe has ambitions to join the Commonwealth as well. I do not believe that one country alone can influence the progress and inclusion of democracy. It is therefore important that we continue to play this role together with important partners. “

The Minister added that the UK Ambassador to Zimbabwe was and will continue to be directly involved in addressing various human rights issues.

“What else can we do? We continue to work with key partners to ensure that human rights under the (Zimbabwe) Constitution are respected. “

Lord St. John of Blesto also questioned the Zimbabwean Cabinet’s signature of the proposed Patriot Bill last week.

“Last week the Zimbabwean cabinet signed the Patriot Bill, which would make it a criminal offense for anyone to criticize President (Emmerson) Mnangagwa and for any member of the opposition to speak negatively about Zimbabwe to a foreign government?

“At a time when Zimbabwe is considering re-entry into the Commonwealth, can the Minister make it clear that our government will only support this once the rule of law is restored and freedom of expression and political freedoms are protected?

Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick added: “Will the Minister outline the discussions that Ministers have had with their Commonwealth counterparts about the ongoing political repression in Zimbabwe in order to build the local economy and political democracy?

Baroness Kate Hoey also said: “Zimbabwe will only become a democracy if the people have genuinely free and fair elections. We saw that recently in Zambia.

“Can the Minister go further and say what else could be done to get Zambia and other countries with SADC to put pressure on Zimbabwe? It has to come from these countries. We can help, but we have to make sure that they do their best so that we can return to a situation where the people of Zimbabwe have truly free and fair elections in 2023.”

In response to questions, the Commonwealth Minister said that SADC and the African Union (AU) play a key role in ensuring that human rights are restored in Zimbabwe.

“I agree that it is absolutely correct to say that the importance of SADC and other organizations and the African Union in general is key and they must play a leading role in these discussions as people see an inclusive, progressive Zimbabwe want.

“In Zimbabwe, rights must be restored, the constitutions respected and human rights guaranteed, including the rights of other political parties to fully participate in the democratic process. These will be part of our current and future discussions with key partners.”

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