

Press Statement, 7 July 2006

**Women in Politics Support Unit Condemns Attack Against Hon. Trudy Stevenson**

Women in Politics Support Unit (WiPSU) expresses its deepest displeasure on the recent violent attack on Member of Parliament for Harare North Mrs. Gertrude Stevenson and her colleagues. We categorically condemn such intolerant behavior and call upon the relevant authorities to take all action against the perpetrators. We note with concern that this attack comes barely a year after another MDC female Member of Parliament Hon. Priscilla Misihairabwi was attacked and assaulted by a group of youths from the party. Sadly, the MP in that case did not get an apology from the party and as though the silence was condoning violence, another assault has occurred.

The assault raises fundamental questions on the extent to which an individual can exercise her democratic right to affiliate and work within a political party of her choice. There is still a lot of intolerance for different political views, and the onus is on all political parties and their membership to foster a culture of political tolerance, as this case manifests a lack of it.

Further, of significance is that violence is perpetrated against women in both the domestic and public spheres. Gender based violence is a serious violation of women's rights and dignity and cannot be tolerated in whatever form or whatever level. Women must be treated with respect in their private and public lives and this kind of brutality on the woman MP is uncalled for.

Politically motivated violence on women deters them from fully participating in decision-making processes. It is worrying that the few women who brave the patriarchal political environment to exercise their political rights are subjected to such abuse. It instills fear in women already in positions of leadership and discourages those interested to contest for political office. Women's fight for representation in decision-making positions at the political party and parliament levels is always a tough one. It is with this in mind that WiPSU is deeply concerned with violent behavior reduces women's involvement in political processes at a time when we are fighting for equal representation and participation. We must celebrate and applaud women who have made it into decision-making positions. We must also appreciate their immense contribution to the development of this country instead of subjecting them to brutality.

It is alleged that youths from the MDC Anti-Senate perpetrated the assault. If this is so WiPSU is deeply concerned with how young people are being indoctrinated with a violence mentality. The MDC (and indeed all political parties) must review its youth policies and programs or else it is breeding a huge social problem which will already showing signs of exploding out of control. We call upon Nelson Chamisa as the Youth Chairperson of the MDC Anti-Senate, who should be a guardian to the building of youth's leadership, to be seen to nurturing that leadership.

We encourage all women running for the rural council elections scheduled for August 2006 to keep on in the race and not be discouraged by this assault.