

Zimbabwe threatens social media activists, after protests

Zimbabwe on Tuesday threatened to crack down on social media activists pressing to oust President Robert Mugabe's government, and warned of the turmoil that followed the Arab Spring.



Image by 123RF

Referring to activists working with "diaspora cyber-terrorists", information minister Christopher Mushohwe cautioned: "They must be warned that the long arm of the law is encircling them."

The comments at a press conference in the capital Harare come after a series of street protests in recent weeks, protesting at Zimbabwe's faltering economy and fuelled by Internet activism. Mushohwe said the government would deal with social media activists and warned it was "closely watching the activities of these subversive elements".

Last week, Mugabe accused his opponents - including popular pastor Evan Mawarire, the figurehead of recent demonstrations - against trying to topple him through protest "like in the Arab countries", a refrain picked up by Mushohwe on Tuesday.

"Let Zimbabweans know, if it happened in Libya, if it happened in Iraq, if it is happening in Syria, it can happen anywhere, so let's not promote it," he said. "That's why you see most of the Libyans and the Syrians are dying every day in the Mediterranean Sea trying to go to Europe to look for peace which they had destroyed in their country. They once upon a time had peace like Zimbabwe."

Mugabe has ruled Zimbabwe for 36 years. But as his cash-strapped government struggles to pay civil servants and the military on time, the long-time leader has faced mounting opposition under the hashtag, "ThisFlag" - a reference to wearing the national flag in public.

"ThisFlag" founder, Mawarire, was detained last month for allegedly trying to overthrow the state, but a court dropped charges against him. Last week, he travelled to the US to meet compatriots there and consider his next move, urging his compatriots to maintain the pressure on the government.

"There are people who are now in trouble because they thought Mawarire was their leader. Where is Mawarire now?" said Mushohwe.

The 92-year-old president, who is increasingly fragile, has vowed to stand for re-election in 2018, though party seniors have long been jockeying to step into the role when he dies. Mugabe's wife Grace and vice president Emmerson Mnangagwa are among the possible successors to one of the world's oldest living heads of state.

Source: [AFP](#).

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