

## Rare justice in rape case

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A Masvingo magistrate has been hailed for handing Zanu-PF war veteran Gilbert Mavhenyengwa a 20-year jail term for assaulting and raping an MDC supporter in the run-up to the 2008 election run-off.

Magistrate Ester Muremba told Mavhenyengwa, 55, that he was a "disrespectful thug and an opportunist who took advantage of the volatile political situation to rape a vulnerable woman". She slammed the Zanu-PF war veteran from Chiredzi for putting the woman and her husband at risk of HIV infection by not using a condom.

Mavhenyengwa led a gang of Zanu-PF youths who broke into the victim's home as she slept with her husband. They forced her out of bed and marched with them to their base 6km away. When she got tired, he hit her with a stick, dragged her behind bushes and raped her.

She was severely assaulted and raped again by several youths at the base. She was tortured and later passed out.

The woman was released after being told to stop supporting the MDC and defect to Zanu-PF. Her husband found her unconscious at home and had to carry her on a bicycle to Mkwesine, where a police report was made, before proceeding to hospital.

The magistrate slammed Mavhenyengwa: "There is no excuse whatsoever for such unruly behaviour," the magistrate said. "He did not use a condom. His behaviour shows that HIV and Aids are the least of his worries. He also put the complainant at risk of being infected. The accused also caused a lot of trauma and suffering to her husband and extended family. He behaved like a thug. He ought to realise that crime does not pay and we have to send a message to society as well."

The sentence was this week hailed as a rare justice for thousands of MDC supporters who were victims of Zanu-PF brutality in the run-up to the presidential run-off boycotted by MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai who had out-pollled President Robert Mugabe and his party in the first round of the poll. MDC-N leader Welshman Ncube's spokesman said his party was pleased with the stiff sentence handed down, describing it as a victory for those who believe political differences can be resolved without violence.

Premier Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC-T also hailed the sentence and called for tougher jail terms for similar offences as did the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition. ?

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