

# Zimbabwe police arrest 9 pastors attending leadership seminar

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WASHINGTON (ABP)—Zimbabwe police arrested nine pastors at a gathering of more than 300 church leaders in late January. At least one of the pastors was Baptist. The arrests were made public Jan. 30 by the [Baptist World Alliance](#).

Raymond Motsi, pastor of Bulawayo Baptist Church, was among the group. The pastors have since been fined and released.

The pastors were charged with violating [Zimbabwe's](#) Public Order and Security Act, which forbids gatherings of more than three without the approval from the police. The meeting was planned by a Christian Alliance group in Kadoma, more than 150 kilometers west of Harare, the country's capital.

Christian Alliance has been accused by the Robert Mugabe-led government of plotting with opposition parties to overthrow his regime.

Denton Lotz, general secretary of the Alliance, said he is concerned about the continuing deterioration in the southern African country.

“We are concerned about freedom and justice worldwide,” he said in a press statement. “Ever since the BWA had a youth conference in Zimbabwe in 1994, Baptists around the world have fallen in love with Zimbabwe. We pray for the four Baptist conventions of Zimbabwe and have been concerned in the past years that many basic freedoms are being threatened.”

Lotz appealed to the Zimbabwe government to “release all pastors who in the performance of their gospel calling are working for peace and justice.”

He also asked Baptists to write their governments encouraging release of unfairly accused pastors and leaders.

“Baptists have always been concerned about religious freedom,” Lotz said. “Such freedoms are being eroded in Zimbabwe with the arrests and threats to the free exercise of religion.”

Zimbabwe gained its independence in 1980 after the end of the apartheid rule of Ian Smith. Mugabe, a hero of the fight for the end of apartheid and for independence, was elected president but has become increasingly repressive over the years in his attempts to hold onto power. Many freedoms have since been curtailed and opposition groups banned, attacked or otherwise harassed.

The four Baptist conventions and unions in Zimbabwe have approximately 450 churches with almost 130,000 members.