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Zimbabwe Opposition will Lobby AU against Mugabe Term Extension

Morgan Tsvangirayi's faction of the MDC, backed by NGOs, said Wednesday it will be urging African Union leaders meeting in summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to object to Harare's plan to postpone the presidential election due next year.

Zimbabwe is not on the agenda of the AU summit, but opposition officials will lobby on the sidelines of the summit. AU foreign ministers meet Thursday and heads of state will come together on Monday.

Opposition sources said the MDC delegation would include Grace Kwinjeh, the faction's deputy secretary for international relations, and Sekai Holland, the opposition grouping's secretary for policy and research.

Chairwoman Eileen Sawyer of the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum said her own group has dispatched a delegation led by lawyer Tafadzwa Mapfumo.

Most provincial organizations of the ruling ZANU-PF party have backed the so-called "harmonization" of ballots under which the 2008 presidential ballot would be put off to 2010 to coincide with a general election, extending the term of President Robert Mugabe. Mr. Mugabe, 82, has ruled Zimbabwe since independence in 1980.

The political opposition and civil society groups have vowed to resist any attempt to amend the constitution to authorize a change in the national election schedule.

Libya has already come out in support of the so-called "harmonization" of elections in Zimbabwe. Its position was stated recently in Harare by Imshaya Ali, a special envoy of Colonel Muamar Gaddafi, who has been in power in Tripoli since 1969.

Senior researcher Chris Maroleng of the Institute of Security Studies in Pretoria said that the AU has been found wanting on previous occasions in dealing with Harare.

Political analyst John Makumbe of the University of Zimbabwe said that although the AU has been reluctant to confront Harare, opposition forces must keep lobbying.

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