

LETTER

'NO' TO CHINESE ARMS

Zimbabwe's regime got a taste of the international isolation critics say it deserves, with its neighbors blocking a shipment of Chinese arms to prevent them from being used against Robert Mugabe's opponents. China finally said the weapons might be returned home.

Union, church and human rights leaders across southern Africa rallied against allowing the Chinese freighter *An Yue Jiang* to dock at ports in any of landlocked Zimbabwe's neighbours.

In the end, governments usually unwilling to criticize Mugabe barred the ship at a time when Zimbabwe's government is being accused of cracking down on dissenters.

Church leaders in Zimbabwe said people were being tortured, abducted and murdered in a campaign of retribution against opposition supporters following the March 29 election, and urged international intervention.

In Washington, the State Department said it had urged countries in southern Africa—notably South Africa, Mozambique, Angola and Namibia—not to allow the ship to dock or unload. It also asked the Chinese government to recall the vessel and not to make further weapons shipments to Zimbabwe until the postelection crisis is resolved.

China insisted the shipment of mortar grenades, ammunition and other weapons was part of "normal military product trade between the two countries," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu said.

A spokesman for Zimbabwean opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai welcomed the development. "It would be pleasing to the people of Zimbabwe to note that there has been solidarity on the continent to stop the arming of the (Mugabe) regime at the expense of the people," said the aide, Nelson Chamisa.

The opposition says post-election violence had displaced 3,000 people, injured 500 and left 10 dead.

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