

Hong Kong: Grace Mugabe Immune In Alleged Attack

Written by Rudi Prinsloo

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Zimbabwean first lady Grace Mugabe is immune from prosecution for her alleged attack on a British photographer in Hong Kong, the government said Sunday.

Richard Jones said Mugabe punched him in the face repeatedly when he was taking pictures of her near a luxury hotel on Jan. 15 while on assignment for The Sunday Times, inflicting at least 10 cuts with the diamond-encrusted rings she was wearing. Mugabe was reportedly vacationing in the Chinese-ruled territory.

Mugabe is exempt from prosecution under Chinese regulations on diplomatic immunity and privileges, Hong Kong's Department of Justice said in a statement sent to The Associated Press.

"Grace Mugabe is not liable to arrest or detention, and enjoys immunity from criminal jurisdiction," the statement said.

Jones and The Sunday Times said they are upset by the decision.

"This isn't justice," Jones told the AP. "If she came back to Hong Kong, is she allowed to attack people at her will and walk away scot-free?"

Michael Sheridan, Far East correspondent for The Sunday Times, called the alleged attack on Jones "an unprovoked criminal assault on the press." Law Yuk-kai, director of Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor, questioned if Mugabe should enjoy immunity when she wasn't performing diplomatic duties.

"The journalist was just doing his job. He was ensuring the public's right to know," Law said.

Mugabe's 85-year-old husband, Robert Mugabe, has been accused of overseeing his country's economic collapse, trampling democratic rights and killing opposition supporters.

The U.S., the European Union and Britain have imposed sanctions on Mugabe's ruling clique, including asset freezes and travel bans.

China has been criticized for supporting corrupt African regimes amid its growing presence there, including Sudan and Zimbabwe. In July, Beijing, along with Russia, vetoed a U.S.-sponsored resolution in the U.N. Security Council that proposed worldwide sanctions against Mugabe and 13 officials.

Calls Sunday to the Zimbabwe Embassy in Beijing seeking comment went unanswered.

Source : Sapa-AP /ts

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