

PUBLIC

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UA 290/08 Torture and ill-treatment/prisoners of conscience

ZIMBABWE Jenni Williams (f)
Magodonga Mahlangu (f)

Jenni Williams and Magodonga Mahlangu, leaders of the activist organisation Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) are at risk of torture and ill-treatment. They were arrested on 16 October and are being held at Bulawayo Remand Prison.

The two activists were arbitrarily arrested after participating in a peaceful protest outside Mhlahlandlela Government Complex in Bulawayo, in which they demanded immediate access to much needed food aid in Zimbabwe. Police used excessive force to break up the peaceful protest by about 200 WOZA activists. Magodonga Mahlangu was beaten by police during her arrest and is reported to be in pain.

Jenni Williams and Magodonga Mahlangu were unlawfully detained at Bulawayo Central police station overnight before being moved to the remand prison on 17 October. The Magistrate Court in Bulawayo remanded the two women in custody until 21 October, when their bail hearing took place without them being present. The state alleged that there was no transport to take them to the bail hearing. The court reserved judgement on the bail application until 24 October. They have been charged under Section 37 1(a) of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act – ‘disturbing the peace, security or order of the public’.

Amnesty International believes that they were arrested purely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, enshrined in the Constitution of Zimbabwe as well as in the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights and the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Zimbabwe is a state party to both human rights treaties. Under these treaties Zimbabwe has an obligation to respect and protect the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. For that reason Amnesty International considers Jenni Williams and Magodonga Mahlangu to be prisoners of conscience. Their arrest is part of the government of Zimbabwe clampdown on human rights defenders who are campaigning to highlight the suffering of the people of Zimbabwe.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Human rights defenders in Zimbabwe have been repeatedly tortured, ill-treated, harassed and intimidated while in custody. They have also been denied access to their lawyers, families, adequate food, warm blankets and medical care as well as sanitary products for women. WOZA members have been ill-treated before while in custody.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Jenni Williams and Magodonga Mahlangu, leaders of Women of Zimbabwe Arise, who have been arrested purely as a result of peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of association, assembly and expression;
- expressing concern that human rights defenders in Zimbabwe have been tortured and ill-treated while in custody and ask him to ensure their safety;

-urging the Attorney General to ensure that Jenni Williams and Magodonga Mahlangu have access to their lawyers, food, medical care and sanitary products while they are in detention;
-calling on him to ensure that they are treated in compliance with human rights standards governing the treatment of detainees, including those contained in Article 7 and Article 10 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

APPEALS TO:

The Attorney-General
Office of the Attorney General
P. Bag 7714
CausewayHarareZimbabwe**Fax: +263 4 777 049**

COPIES TO:

WOZA
PO Box FM701
Famona
Bulawayo
Zimbabwe

and to diplomatic representatives of Zimbabwe accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 3 December 2008.