

JOINT PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Zambia: Authorities escalate attacks on dissent by denying youth leaders right to protest

Zambian authorities have escalated their attacks on dissent by thwarting a planned anti-corruption protest leading to organisers streaming their protest from the outskirts of Lusaka. According to a coalition of civil society organizations, Zambian authorities are escalating their attacks and intolerance for the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly, by clamping down on peaceful dissent in the country.

While the Zambian authorities would like to present a positive state of affairs in the country, the reality is different. Criticism of the authorities related to alleged corruption by government officials and the state of human rights under President Edgar Lungu is violently suppressed. Security forces regularly attack and arrest government critics and human rights activists.

The group called on the Zambian authorities to stop threatening, harassing and intimidating peaceful protesters and allow people to exercise their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Zambia can only become a thriving nation based on respect for human rights and the rule of law in an environment of plurality of views.

Authorities should stop seeing protesters as enemies of the state, and instead take heed of the criticism and not silence them.

On June 22, the Inspector General of Police Kakoma Kanganja [threatened](#) to deal with the youth protesters “accordingly” after denying them permission to hold the march in the country’s capital Lusaka. The youth activists are now fearing for their lives.

The youth activists had notified the police about their plan to hold the march earlier this month. Police denied them a permit under the pretext of lacking capacity to police the march. Zambia’s constitution does not require permission or authorisation to hold a protest.

The Home Affairs Minister, Stephen Kampyongo also spoke out against anti-corruption protests. He warned the protesters to abandon their action or "risk being dealt with".

A Member of Parliament, Tutwa Ngulube from the governing Patriotic Front

also urged the police to break the protesters bones in a [video](#) that was circulated online.

Despite alleging a lack of capacity in denying permission for the protests to go ahead, police were deployed in large numbers across the city to prevent any protest from taking place.

Background

Suppression of dissent is not new in Zambia. Those who have spoken out against alleged corruption have been increasingly [targeted by the authorities in recent years with trumped-up charges](#), including being put in jail to harass and intimidate them. Those who openly speak out against corruption are likely to be targeted as the country prepares to go to the election next year.

Popular Zambian musicians Chama Fumba aka Pilato and Brian Bwembya aka B-Flow have been warning against reports of corruption, inequality and the shrinking space for dissent.

Organizations supporting the public statement:

1. Amnesty International
2. CIVICUS
3. Southern African Human Rights Defenders Network (SAHRDN)
4. ARISA
5. Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA)
6. Southern Africa Litigation Centre (SALC)

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