

URGENT ACTION

SEVEN ACTIVISTS ARRESTED, CHARGED WITH TREASON

Seven activists, arrested on different dates, are facing charges of treason after they attended a training organised by the Center for Non-Violence Action and Strategies (CANVAS) in the Maldives. Five of the activists have already appeared in court and are remanded in custody until 6 June. The offence 'subverting a constitutional government' carries a penalty of up to 20 years in prison. These arrests are part of an ongoing crackdown on human rights defenders, activists and opposition members in the country and are an attempt by the government to stifle peaceful protest over the recently implemented austerity measures.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

President Emmerson Mnangagwa
Munhumutapa Building
Corner Sam Nujoma / Samora Machel
Harare, Zimbabwe
Email: info@opc.gov.zw

Your Excellency President Mnangagwa,

*I am concerned with the arbitrary arrest and trumped up charges against **George Makoni, Tatenda Mombeyarara, Gamuchirai Mukura, Nyasha Mpahlo, Farirai Gumbonzvanda, Sitabile Dewa and Rita Nyamupinga.***

All seven activists have been charged with 'subverting a constitutional government' under Section 22 (2) of Criminal Law (Codification and Reform Act) which attracts a sentence of more than 20 years in prison for attending a training on civic engagement, advocacy and communications in the Maldives from 15 – 17 May. These human rights defenders are being persecuted simply for attending a training on non-violent activism.

I am also worried about the ongoing government crackdown on human rights defenders, activists and opposition members. Since the January 2019 protest, authorities continue to intimidate and harass activists, and threaten the rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression to silence any dissent.

Your Excellency, you have an opportunity to ensure that the government breaks away from the past by ensuring the authorities promote and protect human rights.

I call on you to:

- ***Ensure that charges against seven activists are dropped immediately;***
- ***Ensure the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience detained solely for peacefully exercising their human rights;***
- ***Ensure an end to the crushing of dissent through judicial persecution of human rights defenders, activists and opposition members perceived to be opponents of the ruling party in Zimbabwe;***
- ***Ensure respect for the rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression as enshrined in the Constitution and human rights treaties to which Zimbabwe is a state party.***

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The seven activists attended a training organised by the Center for Non-Violence Action and Strategies (CANVAS) in the Maldives from 15-19 May 2019. The focus of the workshop was civic engagement, advocacy and communications. Returning to Zimbabwe on different dates, George Makoni, Tatenda Mombeyarara, Gamuchirai Mukura, Nyasha Mpahlo were arrested on arrival at Harare Airport on 20 May. Farirai Gumbonzvanda was arrested on arrival the following day, while Stabile Dewa and Rita Nyamupinga were arrested on arrival at Harare Airport on 27 May. Rita, 61 years old, is on chronic medication and has since been hospitalised.

The crackdown on Zimbabwe's civil society, human rights defenders and activists continues with 12 activists charged with treason since January 2019. On Wednesday 17 May, the government used the state-owned and controlled Herald newspaper to accuse civil society organizations of "plotting to unleash violent protest" in Zimbabwe, citing the meeting that the activists had attended.

Five of the activists appeared in court on 23 May and are remanded in custody until 6 June. They appeared in court for bail on 30 May and it was postponed to 31 May. On 31 May the Court postponed the hearing to 7 June. The other two activists, Stabile and Rita, appeared before court on 29 May and have been remanded in custody to 6 June. Police have confiscated their laptops and mobile phones to extract evidence.

The arrest of these activists is an attempt by the government to stifle peaceful protest by Zimbabweans who have been hard hit by the government's austerity measures. The rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression have been under attack in the country since January, after fuel price hikes saw the cost of living skyrocket with basic commodities becoming too expensive for most people especially the economically and socially vulnerable sectors of the population. The economic meltdown and the failure of the austerity measures to improve the lives of Zimbabweans has created a tense atmosphere in the country.

On Tuesday 21 May the government announced a fuel price increase of 46%. This increase came four months after the last increase which resulted in nationwide protests over the deterioration of the country's socio-economic conditions and led to a brutal crackdown by security forces. In an apparent attempt to instil fear, the government deployed both military, police and intelligence units in cities and residential areas. At least 16 people were killed, over 600 people arrested, and more than 300 people injured.

The government policies have driven people deeper into poverty, according to a statement released by the UN on 4 April stating that the austerity measures are hitting the poor. <https://reliefweb.int/report/zimbabwe/zimbabwe-policies-hitting-poor-hardest-say-un-rights-experts>

The government has also issued threats to the public over any planned protest. Most recently, on 27 May, the Minister of Home affairs responded to a statement made by the opposition party saying that government would crackdown on any protests. .

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 12 July 2019

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: George Makoni (he/him), Tatenda Mombeyarara (he/him), Gamuchirai Mukura (he/him), Nyasha Mpahlo (he/him), Farirai Gumbonzvanda (she/her), Sitabile Dewa (she/her) and Rita Nyamupinga (she/her).