

URGENT ACTION

CHARGES AGAINST STUDENT PROTESTORS DROPPED

On 5 April, the Zimbabwean authorities dropped the charges of “malicious damage to property” against University of Zimbabwe students, Benjamin Watadza, Emmanuel Sitima, Comfort Mpfu, Lionel Madamombe, Darlington Chigwena and Gamuchirai Chaburumunda. The students were arbitrarily detained and charged in connection to a peaceful protest held in Harare city on 15 May 2023.

NO FURTHER ACTION IS REQUESTED. MANY THANKS TO ALL WHO SENT APPEALS.

On 5 April, the politically motivated charges of ‘malicious damage to property’ against student protestors, **Benjamin Watadza** (24), **Emmanuel Sitima** (24), **Comfort Mpfu** (22), **Lionel Madamombe** (24), **Darlington Chigwena** and **Gamuchirai Chaburumunda** were dropped by the Zimbabwean authorities.

The six students were arrested in May and June 2023 following their peaceful protest at the University of Zimbabwe, where they were enrolled, on 15 May 2023 in Harare, Zimbabwe’s capital. In the protest, they called for an end to the persecution of opposition leaders and the release of Citizens’ Coalition for Change party member of parliament, Job Sikhala. The six students were charged with “malicious damage to property” on the basis that the same calls they made during their peaceful protest were found illegally spray painted on government buildings the following day, despite there being no evidence linking the students to the spray paintings.

The six students were held in arbitrary detention in Harare Central prison after their arrest. Gamuchirai Chaburumunda was granted bail on 4 July 2023; Emmanuel Sitima, Comfort Mpfu, Benjamin Watadza and Lionel Madamombe on 17 July 2023; and Darlington Chigwena on 24 July 2023, after 62 days in pretrial detention. The authorities argued that they were ‘capable of causing more trouble for the State’. Their detention resulted in the students missing their exams as the University of Zimbabwe refused to work with the correctional services to arrange for them to sit for “special exams” citing that these are only allowed in extraordinary circumstances such as illness and bereavement.

The Urgent Action was impactful as it amplified the case regionally and globally in addition to local calls, especially the student movements’.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Benjamin Watadza, Emmanuel Chitima, Comfort Mpfu, Lionel Madamombe, Darlington Chigwena (all he/his/him), Gamuchirai Chaburumunda (she/ her)

THIS IS THE SECOND AND FINAL OUTPUT FOR UA 66/23

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr46/6964/2023/en/>

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