

URGENT ACTION

END CRACKDOWN ON ACTIVISTS AND OPPOSITION

Ahead of the 44th Ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Southern African Development community in Zimbabwe on 17 August, the government is systematically clamping down on dissent. In an attempt to silence critical voices and dissuade potential protests, the police and security forces have arbitrarily arrested over 160 activists, political party members, student union activists and civil society members on charges relating to disorderly conduct, criminal nuisance and plotting to incite protests. Some of those arrested were severely tortured and sustained injuries that required hospitalization.

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

Minister of Justice. Legal and Parliamentary Affairs

Honourable Ziyambi Ziyambi

Mgandane Dlodlo Building (New Gvt Complex)

Cnr Samora Machel Avenue & Simon Vengesai

Harare, Zimbabwe

Emails: pr@justice.gov.zw; justice@justice.gov.zw

X: @MoJLPA

Dear Minister,

I am writing to express my grave concerns regarding the worrying trend of suppression of civic space, arrests of **opposition members, human rights defenders and activists**, and threats against dissenting views in Zimbabwe ahead of the 44th Ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), scheduled to take place on 17 August in Harare, Zimbabwe. This crackdown includes the arbitrary detention of approximately 160 people, comprising of members of the opposition, activists and human rights defenders, some of whom have allegedly been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. Those arrested are being charged, among other things, with 'disorderly conduct in public place' and 'criminal nuisance', on assumptions that they were planning protests ahead of the SADC Summit. Those in the ruling party have also issued threats against anyone who wants to protest.

The crackdown began on 16 June when the police arrested and arbitrarily detained [78 people including Citizens Coalition for Change \(CCC\) members](#), including CCC interim party leader Jameson Timba, while they were gathering at a private residence. On 31 July, activists including **Namatai Kwekweza, Robson Chere, Samuel Gwezi and Vusumuzi Moyo** were forcibly removed from a plane and arrested by state agents. The four were held for eight hours without access to their lawyer and have been denied bail. Robson Chere was tortured in detention, and his extensive injuries from the torture puts him at risk of kidney failure and death if he does not receive adequate medical care.

The arrest and arbitrary detention of the activists is deeply concerning and a violation of Zimbabwe's constitutional and international human rights obligations including under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which the country is a state party. I am concerned about the misuse of the criminal justice system as a tool to harass and intimidate protesters, activists and those with dissenting views.

I urge you and your government to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of all those detained for exercising their rights in the recent crackdown on civic space and drop all charges against them as they are detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their human rights. I also strongly urge you to ensure Robson Chere, pending his release, is granted urgent medical attention; and ensure an effective investigation into his torture. As you assume the position of SADC Chairperson, I also urge you and the authorities to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of everyone in the country, including the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 27 June, while addressing the ZANU PF (Patriotic Front) Central Committee, Zimbabwe's President warned against "rogue elements in the form of opposition political parties bent on peddling falsehoods and instigating acts of civil disorder, especially before, during and after regional and world state events" and said, "such acts would be dealt with decisively". On 28 June, the Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Minister issued a statement warning against "criminal and opportunistic elements within the opposition, certain politicians, and some civil society organizations" and that law enforcement will apprehend those who "undermine the justice delivery through causing chaos and mayhem".

To date, approximately 160 people have been arrested including opposition political party members, activists and human rights defenders.

- 29 June, five members of the National Democratic Working group were arrested at a private residence in Kuwadzana, Harare for holding an 'unsanctioned' meeting. The group was having meeting regarding the monthly monetary contribution to assist vulnerable and disadvantaged families.
- On 3 July, police arrested another six people with the Community Voices Zimbabwe media organization in the town of Gokwe, in Zimbabwe's Midlands province.
- On 24 July, 44 Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU) students including their leader Emmanuel Sitima were arrested during their general council meeting. The activists were beaten before taken into custody and later release after being forced to pay admission of guilt fines for 'disorderly conduct'. The students maintain that they committed no crime and will challenge their prosecution.
- On 31 July, activists including Namatai Kwekweza, Robson Chere, Samuel Gwezi and Vusumuzi Moyo were forcibly removed from a plane and arrested by state agents. The four were held for 8 hours without access to their lawyer. The leader of Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (ARTUZ) Robson Chere severely tortured during the detention. The activists have been charged with 'disorderly conduct' for participating in a peaceful protest outside the Harare Magistrates court demanding the release of the 76 CCC members who were appearing for a remand hearing. The group have been denied bail including Robson Chere whose extensive injuries puts him at risk of kidney failure and death if he does not receive adequate medical care at his chosen medical facility.
- On 1 August, Kariba Member of Parliament John Houghton and 13 other individuals were arrested in Kariba town for staging a peaceful demonstration against the continued incarceration opposition party leader Jameson Timba and 74 party activists. On the same day, Bruce Moyo, the councillor representing Ward 22 Nkulumane, Bulawayo was arrested by state agents for allegedly staging an anti-govt protest demanding an end to "one-party rule" and for denouncing the arrest of CCC leader Jameson Timba & other Harare residents. He will remain in custody until court appearance scheduled for 16 August. Bulawayo Senator Hon. Gideon Shoko was also arrested on the same day.
- On 2 August several arrests took place including Bishop Kevin Nyamakanga who was arrested at his home in Harare for "plotting to incite public violence during the SADC summit"; Jacob Ngarivhume, the opposition Transform Zimbabwe political party leader, was arrested in Mutare and later transferred to Harare where he was charges alongside Kelvin Gonde for participating in an 'unlawful gathering and disorderly conduct'; 11 residents were also arrested in Mutare for allegedly gathering at a house and accused of "plotting to carry out acts of public violence meant to disturb the successful hosting of the SADC summit".
- On 3 August Brian Nyoni and Tineyi Munetsi were arrested separate incidents, Brian was taken into custody in Hwange Police station and interviewed by the police who also confiscated his phone. He was released after 2 hours without charges after the police denied having him in custody. Tineyi Munetsi was arrested and accused of having participated in the January 2019 anti-govt protests. Tineyi Munetsi also contested the 2023 parliamentary elections.
- On 4 August, Opposition MP Daniel Molokele and Councillor Ellen Zulu presented themselves to the Hwange Police station after being summoned by the Zimbabwe Republic police. The were allowed to leave after 2 hours following questioning over allegations of mobilizing people to protest at the SADC summit. The two denied these allegations and were warned against mobilizing people for protest and to fulfil their intentions within the law.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 10 December 2024

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

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr46/8338/2024/en/>