

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVISTS RELEASED ON BAIL, AWAITING TRIAL

The trial of seven activists, charged with treason for attending a training in the Maldives, has yet to begin due to the authorities' lack of preparedness. The activists have appeared in court three times and the next court date is on 1 August. The activists were released between 7 and 10 June on bail of ZWL\$1000 each and on condition that they report to the police station every day.

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

*President of the Republic of Zimbabwe
His Excellency, Emmerson D Mnangagwa
Munhumutapa Building
Cnr Samora Machel Avenue and Sam Nujoma
Private Bag 7700
Causeway, Harare
Zimbabwe
Email: info@opc.gov.zw*

Your Excellency President Mnangagwa,

*I write to you to express serious concern over the treason charges levelled against seven activists **George Makoni, Tatenda Mombeyarara, Gamuchirai Mukura, Nyasha Mpahlo, Farirai Gumbonzvanda, Sitabile Dewa and Rita Nyamupinga** simply for attending a training organised by the Center for Non-Violence Action and Strategies (CANVAS) in Maldives from 15 to 17 May.*

The seven activists were arrested in May on arrival back into the country, detained and 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. They were released between 7 and 10 June on bail of ZWL\$1000 each and on condition that they report to the police station every day.

They have appeared in court for trial three times, on 12 July, 19 July and 25 July. In all appearances, their case has been postponed due to the authorities' lack of preparedness. The next court date is set for 1 August.

The activists should never have been charged in the first place since attending a training on non-violent activism is not a crime. Their trial is part of a disturbing trend by your government to intimidate and harass activists.

Your Excellency, I call on you to;

- *Ensure the charges against the seven activists are dropped immediately and unconditionally;*
- *To ensure an end to the crackdown on human rights defenders and activists and judicial persecution of human rights defenders, activists and opposition members;*
- *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,

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The seven activists attended a training organised by the Center for Non-Violence Action and Strategies (CANVAS) in the Maldives from 15-17 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.

Five of the activists were granted bail on 7 June whilst the other two Sitabile and Rita got bail on 10 June. All activists were released on bail of ZWL\$1000 each and on condition that they report to the police station every day. The activists have since appeared in court on 12 July, 19 July and 25 July. Their trial has not begun as the authorities are still collecting evidence. Their lawyers are also pushing for the matter to be referred to the constitutional court, given the police arrested them pending investigation. They are also seeking to challenge the deplorable conditions under which the activists were detained.

The crackdown against civil society, human rights defenders and activists and opposition leaders continues. An opposition member of Parliament Job Sikhala was also arrested and charged with treason following his address at an MDC party supporters rally in Bikita Masvingo on 6 July. He was arrested in Harare and on the day he was supposed to appear in court, the police blindfolded him and transported him to Gutu without his lawyer's knowledge. He was later set free on bail of ZWL\$5000. MDC's Youth Assembly Secretary General Gift Ostallos Siziba was arrested and charged with incitement to commit public violence.

Tensions have been on the rise in the country over the economic hardships caused by poor economic policies and austerity measures. In January, protests over the fuel hike resulted in the killing of 16 people by security forces and hundreds were arrested. To date there has been no accountability. The arrest of the civil society activists and opposition leaders is an attempt by the government to suppress any form of dissent or peaceful protest by Zimbabweans who have been hard hit by the government's economic policies. The government has also issued threats to the public over any planned protests. In response to an anti-government protest held in London by Zimbabwean diaspora, against visiting Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade relations, the Government stated that the 'sceptre of violence during protests we see in Zimbabwe forcing the security services to act has reared its ugly head in foreign land...' justifying intervention by security forces.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: [English]

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: [11 09 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).

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: [<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr46/0450/2019/en/>]