

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVISTS GIVEN TWO YEAR SUSPENDED SENTENCE

Six Zimbabwean activists who were arrested in February 2011 were convicted on 19 March on charges of “conspiracy to commit public violence” and sentenced two days later to carry out 420 hours community service and pay a fine of US\$500 each. They were also sentenced to a two year suspended sentence, on the condition they do not commit a similar offence in the next five years and that they complete the community service.

The six convicted activists are University of Zimbabwe law lecturer and former opposition parliamentarian **Munyaradzi Gwisai**, anti-debt campaigner **Hopewell Gumbo**, Zimbabwe Labour Centre director **Antonetta Choto**, student leader **Welcome Zimuto**, and social activists **Eddson Chakuma** and **Tatenda Mombeyarara**. They were arrested with 39 others and all were initially charged with treason after attending and organising a lecture entitled ‘Revolt in Egypt and Tunisia: What lessons can be learnt by Zimbabwe and Africa’. On 7 March 2011, 39 of the activists were released after a Magistrates court acquitted them. The remaining six, who either spoke at the lecture or work with the Zimbabwean chapter of the International Socialist Organisation or the Zimbabwe Labour Centre, were held in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day until they were released on bail on 16 March after spending 27 days in prison. The activists told the court that they were tortured by security agents while in custody, but no-one has been held accountable for the alleged torture.

The state later dropped the treason charges and prosecuted the activists on charges of conspiracy to commit public violence under Section 188 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act. The activists will appeal both the conviction and sentence with the High Court. Although the activists were given a non-custodial sentence, the conviction sets a very bad precedent in Zimbabwe and will severely restrict the work of human rights defenders, further curtailing rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

Please write immediately in English or your own language:

- To the Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs, and the Attorney General expressing concern that the six were convicted for exercising their internationally and constitutionally recognised right to freedom of expression
- Urging the two to end politically motivated prosecutions of people exercising their right to freedom of expression, association, and assembly.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 3 MAY 2012 TO:

Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs

Hon Patrick Chinamasa
Government of Zimbabwe
New Government Complex
P. Bag 7751, Causeway
Harare
Zimbabwe
Fax: +263 479 0901
Salutation: Dear Minister

The Attorney General

Johannes Tomana
Government of Zimbabwe
P. Bag 7714, Causeway
Harare
Zimbabwe
Fax: +263 477 7049 (please say ‘fax’ clearly)
Salutation: Dear Attorney General

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the third update of UA 55/11. Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR46/013/2011/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Name: Munyaradzi Gwisai, Hopewell Gumbo, Antonetta Choto, Welcome Zimuto, Eddson Chakuma and Tatenda Mombeyarara

Gender: Munyaradzi Gwisai (m), Hopewell Gumbo (m), Antonetta Choto (f), Welcome Zimuto (m), Eddson Chakuma (m) and Tatenda Mombeyarara (m)

Further information on UA: 55/11 Index: AFR 46/005/2012 Issue Date: 22 March 2012

