

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVISTS' SENTENCES LIKELY TO BE OVERTURNED

Six Zimbabwean activists convicted in March 2012 of conspiring to commit public violence have had their community service orders suspended following an appeal. It is likely that the orders, and suspended prison sentences handed down to the six, will now be overturned by the High Court.

Eddson Chakuma, Antonater Choto, Hopewell Gumbo, Munyaradzi Gwisai, Tatenda Mombeyarara and Welcome Zimuto were among a group of 45 social justice, trade union and human rights activists that were arrested and charged with treason on 19 February 2011 after organising and attending a lecture entitled "Revolt in Egypt and Tunisia: What lessons can be learnt by Zimbabwe and Africa". Thirty-nine of the activists were released the following month after the charges against them were dropped, but the remaining six continued to be held until 16 March 2011, when they were released on bail. Some of the activists reported that they had been tortured during their detention. In July 2011 the treason charges were dropped and the six activists were told they would face the lesser charge of 'conspiring to commit public violence' which carries a maximum 10 year prison term.

On 19 March 2012 the six activists were convicted of conspiring to commit public violence under section 188 of the Criminal Law Codification and Reform Act, and sentenced two days later a \$500 fine, a two year prison sentence suspended on the condition that they do not commit a similar offence in the next five years and that they complete 420 hours of community service each. Amnesty International criticised these charges as being politically motivated and a violation of the activists' freedom of expression, and called for the convictions to be overturned.

On 13 April, following an appeal against the conviction, a High Court judge suspended the community service order whilst the case is under review. It is now likely that the High Court will overturn both the convictions and sentences of the six activists.

Many thanks to all who sent appeals. No further action is required. Amnesty International will continue to monitor this case.

This is the fourth update of UA 55/11. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR46/005/2012/en>

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

Further information on UA: 55/11 Index: AFR 46/007/2012 Issue Date: 15 May 2012