

URGENT ACTION

TORTURED ACTIVISTS RELEASED ON BAIL

The three activists, Joana Mamombe, Cecelia Chimbi and Netsai Marova who were abducted, sexually violated and tortured in May 2020, were released on bail following their appeal to the High Court. The activists were arrested on 10 June, a few days after being discharged from hospital. Adding to previous charges of breach of peace and violating lockdown regulations, the authorities accused them of lying about their torture and charged them with communicating or publishing false statement prejudicial to the state according Section 31 (a)(1)(iii) and defeating or obstructing the course of justice as defined in section 184(1)(f) of the Criminal Law Act.

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

Hon Kazembe Kazembe
Minister of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage
11th Floor Mukwati Building
Cnr 4th Street and Selous Avenue
P Bag 7703, Causeway, Harare
Zimbabwe
Email: thesecretary@moha.gov.zw

Minister Kazembe Kazembe,

Three activists, **Joana Mamombe, Cecelia Chimbi and Netsai Marova**, abducted from state custody, sexually violated, tortured and hospitalised in May 2020, for leading a demonstration over the government's failure to provide social protection for the poor during COVID 19 lockdown, were released on bail following their appeal to the High Court.

After being discharged from hospital, the activists were arrested again on 10 June 2020. Adding to previous charges breach of peace and violating lockdown regulations, the authorities accused them of lying about their torture and charged them with communicating or publishing false statement prejudicial to the state and defeating or obstructing the course of justice as defined in the Criminal Law Act. Without any thorough investigation, the authorities have accused the women of faking their abduction and seeking Western sympathy.

Therefore, I urge you as Minister of Home Affairs to:

- **Immediately drop the fabricated charges against the three activists;**
- **Undertake a thorough, independent, impartial, transparent and effective investigation into their enforced disappearance from state custody and into all accounts of sexual assault and torture against them;**
- **Bring to justice those suspected to be responsible and ensure that the victims and their families have access to justice and effective remedies which include restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition.**

Yours sincerely,

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Joanna Mamombe, an MDC Alliance legislator for Harare West, Cecilia Chimhiri, the MDC Youth National Vice Chairperson and Netsai Marova, Youth Deputy Organising Secretary, were arrested on 13 May for leading an anti-government protest taking place that day over the authorities' response to the COVID-19 outbreak and hunger in the country. They were arrested at a police roadblock, manned by police and soldiers near Warren Park, along Bulawayo Road in Harare. They were taken to Harare Central Police Station where they were asked to get into another vehicle under the pretext that they were being taken to Warren Park Police Station. According to the activists, their heads were covered in sacks/hoods and they were driven to an unknown place where they were beaten on the soles of their feet, sexually assaulted and forced to eat human excreta. On 14 May, the national police spokesperson Assistant Commissioner Paul Nyathi confirmed their arrest, though he was not aware of where they were being held. But on the same day, the police denied the activists were in their custody, through their official Twitter handle.

The three activists were later found in the early hours of Friday 15 May, dumped in Bindura, 87 km from Harare, with their clothes torn and brutally assaulted. They were hospitalised. Whilst in hospital the authorities charged them for breaching Section 37 of Criminal Code, that is gathering with intent to promote public violence, breach of peace, which provides for imprisonment up to five years or a fine or both and Section 5(3) and (1) of Statutory Instrument 99/20 that prohibits gatherings, which provides for one-year imprisonment or a fine or both. Through a special court conducted in hospital and the three were granted bail of ZWD\$1 000.

On 10 June the three activists were arrested whilst they were at their lawyers' offices. They were accused of lying about their torture and charged with Section 31 (a)(1)(iii) of the Criminal Law Act which is communicating or publishing false statement prejudicial to the state as well section 184(1)(f) of the Criminal Law Act which is defeating or obstructing the course of justice as defined in section 184(1)(f). They were denied bail on 15 June and remanded in custody until 26 June. Whilst in custody they were denied access to food from their relatives. Their lawyers appealed to the High Court. Eventually the High Court granted them bail on 26 June under onerous conditions including bail of ZWD\$10,000.00, reporting 3 times a week to the police and barring them from communicating about their matter directly or otherwise with any of the public and or private media, including social media.

On the day of their arrest, on 10 June, the nine UN Special Rapporteurs, called for an end to abductions and torture and called for their charges to be immediately dropped. Some government officials including the Minister of Justice, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Media, Information and Broadcasting have dismissed their disappearance and claimed that it had been 'stage managed' by the opposition. The Minister of Justice has come out calling for their arrest. The Minister of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage gave a statement poking loopholes in their story and accusing them of seeking Western sympathy before instituting an investigation. He also accused the doctors who examined them of being anti- government.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 25 August 2020

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Joana Mamombe (Her/she), Cecilia Chimhiri (Her/she), Netsai Marova (Her/she)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr46/2339/2020/en/>