

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST, OPPOSITION MEMBERS CHARGED WITH TREASON

Activist Rashid Mahiya and Members of Parliament with the opposition, Joanna Mamombe and Charlton Hwende were arrested on different dates in Zimbabwe. All three have been charged with 'subverting a constitutional government' which attracts a sentence of more than 20 years in prison. This charge is in connection with a three-day national shutdown called for on 14-16 January in protest against a hike in fuel prices.

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

His Excellency
President Emmerson Mnangagwa
 Munhumutapa Building
 Corner Sam Nujoma / Samora Machel
 Harare, Zimbabwe
 Email: info@opc.gov.zw

Your Excellency President Mnangagwa,

I am concerned with the arbitrary arrest and trumped up charges against **Rashid Mahiya, Joanna Mamombe and Charlton Hwende**.

Rashid Mahiya, an activist and Chairperson of the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition group was arrested on 26 February and was freed on bail on 7 March. Joanna Mamombe, the youngest female Member of Parliament with the opposition party Movement for Democratic Change Alliance (MDC-A) was arrested on 2 March whilst attending a parliamentary workshop and has also been released on bail. Charlton Hwende, an MDC Member of Parliament for Kuwadzana was arrested on 5 March upon arrival at the airport in Harare after being out of the country since 21 December 2018 for medical treatment.

All three have been charged with 'subverting a constitutional government' which attracts a sentence of more than 20 years in prison in an ongoing government crackdown on human rights defenders, activists and opposition members. The charges are in connection with a three-day national shutdown called for by the Zimbabwe of Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) on 14-16 January in protest against a hike in fuel prices in Zimbabwe.

They are to appear in court; Rashid on 12 March, Joanna on 19 March and Charlton on 20 March.

I call on you to;

- Ensure that charges against Rashid Mahiya, Joanna Mamombe and Charlton Hwende are dropped immediately;
- End the crackdown on human rights defenders, activists and opposition members in Zimbabwe and ensure respect for the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and that the judicial system is not misused to persecute perceived opponents of ZANU PF, the ruling party.

Yours sincerely,

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 12 January, President Emmerson Mnangagwa announced fuel price hikes, which took effect at midnight. The prices of both diesel and petrol, went up by 150 per cent. In response to the announcement, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), the largest labour organization in the country, called for a three-day national stay-away protest action. ZCTU's President, Peter Mutasa, called on Zimbabweans to stay away from work, businesses and schools from Monday 14 to Wednesday 16 January, to protest what he called 'the general astronomical price increases since last year against stagnant salaries.' He added that the fuel price increases were "insensitive and provocative".

Many Zimbabweans across the country heeded the call by ZCTU for a national stay-away action, staying at home from 14 to 16 January, bringing business to a standstill in major parts of the country. This protest set in motion one of the most brutal crackdowns by the authorities seen in recent years in Zimbabwe, in an apparent attempt to restore fear in Zimbabwe. The government deployed military, police and intelligence units in cities and residential areas including Harare, Bulawayo, Chitungwiza, Epworth, Dzivarasekwa, Mbare, Gweru, Pumula, and Mabvuku. Witnesses told Amnesty International of widespread beatings, deprivation of personal liberty, torture and other ill-treatment such as being made to roll in sewage or ashes from burnt tyres. Strong allegations of rape and other sexual assault of women also emerged.

As a result of the crackdown, at least 12 people had been killed by the security forces by 18 January. This was in contravention of the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights to which Zimbabwe is a state party. On 17 January, the number of those arrested had risen to over 600 as disclosed by the Minister of State Security.

The police also accused Chairperson of Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), Rashid Mahiya of attempting to overthrow the government. Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition group is a coalition of more than 80 Human Rights Organisations. Rashid was forced to go into hiding after the authorities threatened to arrest him for his involvement in the national stay-away and sending a petition asking the Africa Union to intervene in the crisis in Zimbabwe on 16 January. Soldiers went to his house on 18 January, took his mother and interrogated her about his location. They then took her to the house of Rashid's younger brother, Douglas Mahiya. He was not there when they arrived but came to the house later in the company of his lawyer. The soldiers refused to talk to the lawyer and assaulted Douglas. Both Douglas and his mother were later released and sought medical treatment.

On 23 January, state security agents raided Rashid Mahiya's home and confiscated passports of his wife and kids (aged seven months and six years). They also detained Rashid's sister at her house in Chitungwiza to coerce her to reveal his whereabouts. Rashid Mahiya surrendered to the police on 26 February. He was granted bail on 7 March with stringent conditions.

Joanna Mamombe was arrested whilst at a female parliamentarians' workshop in Nyanga on Saturday 2 March. She was forced to flee the country when the police threatened to arrest her for a speech she made in her constituency urging people to engage in the national stay-away. She later returned to the country on 25 February. On 26 February, a group of armed men broke into her mother's house looking for her.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: [English]

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: [22 04 2019]

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: [Rashid Mahiya – He/His, Joanna Mamombe, She/Her; *Charlton Hwende- He/His*]

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: [none]