

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER RELEASED ON BAIL

Prominent Zimbabwean human rights lawyer Beatrice Mtetwa was released on bail by a High Court Judge on Monday 25 March. She had been detained since Sunday 17 March and was initially denied bail on Wednesday 20 March by a Magistrates Court despite the High Court issuing an order for her immediate release on Monday 18 March.

On the morning of Sunday 17 March, **Beatrice Mtetwa** responded to the call of a client, Thabani Mpfu, who is a staff member in Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's office. When she arrived at his home, police were conducting a search. She asked to be shown the search warrant and told police that what they were doing was "unlawful, unconstitutional, illegal and undemocratic". Police did not show her the search warrant, and instead arrested her for "obstructing the course of justice".

Following her arrest, Beatrice Mtetwa's lawyers obtained a High Court order for her immediate release on the grounds that the arrest was unlawful. Police did not comply with the order and she remained in police custody. On 20 March, she was remanded in custody after the Magistrate Court in Harare denied her bail. On 21 March, Beatrice Mtetwa's lawyers filed an urgent application with the High Court for her release. On Friday 22 March, Beatrice Mtetwa appeared before a High Court Judge but the bail hearing was postponed until Monday 25 March, meaning that she spent the weekend in prison and therefore a total of eight nights in custody. She was released on bail set at USD500 after the judge set aside the Magistrate Court's earlier ruling.

Amnesty International considers Beatrice Mtetwa's arrest and detention to be an attack on the legal profession in Zimbabwe and in particular human rights lawyers. Zimbabwean human rights lawyers have fearlessly defended targeted HRDs and political activists in the context of systematic violations of the rights of freedom of expression, association and assembly which have intensified in the run up to Zimbabwe's 2013 presidential elections.

Thank you to all those who sent appeals. No further action is required at this time but Amnesty International will continue to monitor the case.

This is the first update of UA 20/13 (AFR 46/002/2013). For more information, see <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR46/002/2013/en>

Name: Beatrice Mtetwa
Gender m/f: f

Further information on UA: 20/13 Index: AFR 46/003/2013 Issue Date: 27 March 2013

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