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Zimbabwe: Judicial harassment of nine human rights defenders

On 14 July 2021, nine human rights defenders appeared in front of the Masvingo Magistrate Court. They have been charged with Section 37 of the Criminal Law Codification for “participating in unlawful gathering with intent to promote public violence”. The examination process is now over and a court date was set for 23 July 2021.

Prosper Tiringindi, R Mavhenge, Admire Mufamba, Mataga Clara, Christine Mukuma, Viola Masuma, Kudzai Chamunorwa, Matter Zigwata and Leeroy Tayl, are all members of the **Masvingo Residents Forum (MRF)**. MRF works throughout the Masvingo province to represent and support communities by advocating for effective, transparent and affordable municipal services and other services. MRF is an NGO that promotes and defends social and economic justice.

On 23 April 2021, the MRF organized a peaceful protest outside the Masvingo City Council. Community members gathered outside the City Council with empty buckets to protest the water shortage that they have been suffering from for two months. The nine human rights defenders made their way into the City Council to submit their petition regarding the water shortage. Upon entering the City Council offices, the human rights defenders were detained in the City Council offices by Masvingo municipal police, and the Zimbabwe Republic Police arrived to arrest them. The human rights defenders were detained at Masvingo Central Police Station and appeared in court at Masvingo Magistrate Court on 24 of April 2021, where they were granted \$5000 bail each. Their final court appearance on 14 July 2021 completed the review process. The defence will apply for the case’s dismissal, for which the court date is set for 23 July 2021.

Front Line Defenders condemns the judicial harassment of human rights defenders Prosper Tiringindi, R Mavhenge, A Mufamba, Mataga Clara, Christine Mukuma, Viola Masuma, Kudzai Chamunorwa, Matter Zigwata and Leeroy Tayl. Front Line Defenders believes that the charges against these human rights defenders are solely a result of their peaceful and legitimate work as human rights defenders.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities of Zimbabwe to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against the nine human rights defenders as it is believed that they are solely motivated by his/her legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Immediately cease all further harassment of the nine human rights defenders and Masvingo Residents Forum, as Front Line Defenders believes that their arrest is solely as a result of their legitimate work in defence of human rights;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Zimbabwe are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including harassment, namely the members of Masvingo Residents Forum.