

23 November 2018

## Zambia: Human rights defender Gregory Chifire sentenced to six years in prison

On 23 November 2018, the Supreme Court of Zambia sentenced anti-corruption campaigner **Gregory Chifire** to six years imprisonment on contempt of court charges. The human rights defender had called for an investigation into potential judicial corruption involving the largest bank in the country and it is believed he was targeted as a result of this.

[Gregory Chifire](#) is the director of the Southern Africa Network Against Corruption (SANAC). He has faced repeated harassment from authorities and cadres of the Patriotic Front (PF) ruling party because of his human rights work and his efforts to expose corruption at the highest levels.

The charges against Gregory Chifire were brought following an article he wrote in the aftermath of a March 2018 ruling in a case where Stanbic Bank (the largest bank in Zambia) referred Savenda, a credit bureau, for blacklisting. The ruling overturned a lower court ruling granting Savenda USD \$20 million in damages. On 9 May, in an article published in [The Zambian Eye](#), an online news portal, the human rights defender criticised this ruling, on the basis that the judges in the case between the two companies did not follow the law and he implicitly questioned whether there had been any form of corruption involved. In other media reports, [investigative journalists reported](#) on apparent evidence Stanbic had bribed judges from the Supreme Court.

Following publication of his article, Gregory Chifire wrote a letter to Chief Justice Irene Mambilima of the Supreme Court concerning the matter. Following this, charges were brought against the human rights defender and Bishop John Mambo, Chairman of the Board of the Chikondi Foundation (a church-based charitable organisation providing for the poor), who also wrote a letter on the matter to Chief Justice Mambilima. Both men were charged with contempt of court for their letters. Gregory Chifire denied the charges in a trial which began on 17 July and concluded on 19 September.

In the ruling against him on 23 November, the Supreme Court sentenced Gregory Chifire to six years in prison following a trial that was seen by civil society in the country as unfair and based on trumped up charges. According to human rights defenders, the case targeting Gregory Chifire was instigated in order to silence them from speaking out on issues regarding corruption. Six other activists, including human rights defenders **Laura Miti** and **Chama Fumba** (known popularly as Pilato), are currently on trial, charged with allegedly violating the Public Order Act, for protesting against the expenditure of USD \$42 million on firetrucks in 2017.

On 19 November, Front Line Defenders released a [report](#), *Creeping Towards Authoritarianism?: Impacts on Human Rights Defenders and Civil Society in Zambia*, documenting the growing efforts by the government to intimidate and silence human rights defenders using judicial procedures, physical intimidation and harassment. Smear and defamation campaigns are also being used to target civil society activists in pro-government and government controlled as well as on social media.

Front Line Defenders condemns the sentence against Gregory Chifire as part of wider efforts by the Zambian authorities to target human rights defenders in the country who expose corruption and seek to hold officials to account.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Zambia to:**

1. Immediately release Gregory Chifire and quash the sentence against him;
2. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in all circumstances so that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.