

26 February 2019

Zimbabwe: Human rights defender Rashid Mahiya detained and charged

On 26 February 2019, human rights defender **Rashid Mahiya** was remanded in custody until 12 March 2019, charged with “subverting a constitutionally elected government / treason”. He had handed himself into police on 25 February, following a relentless search for him by the Zimbabwe Defense Forces. He was one of a number of human rights defenders to have been included on a police ‘wanted’ list, following the national strike that took place in mid-January.

[Rashid Mahiya](#) is a human rights defender and the Chairperson of the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, a coalition of 80 civil society organisations working together to bring about democratic change in Zimbabwe. Its membership draws from women’s groups social movements, residents’ associations, labour unions, churches, human rights lawyers, teachers’ groups and health professionals.

On 26 February 2019, the State prosecution alleged that Rashid Mahiya was responsible for the violence that took place during the national strike in mid-January. The prosecution recommended that bail not be granted to the human rights defender bail on the basis that he was likely to abscond, to interfere with evidence and witnesses, and to commit additional offenses. Rashid Mahiya’s lawyer is set to file an application for bail at the High Court on 27 February.

On 25 February, the Zimbabwe Defense Forces ransacked Rashid Mahiya’s home, demanding to know the whereabouts of the human rights defender. The security forces severely assaulted the human rights defender’s brother, before abducting his mother, in an attempt to force Rashid Mahiya to hand himself in. On learning of the assault and abduction, the human rights defender presented himself to police. His mother was released after a few hours.

In the early hours of 17 February 2017, around 20 plainclothes police officers in two unmarked vehicles and a minibus arrived at the house of Okay Machisa, in Harare. Okay Machisa is human rights defender and the National Executive Director of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights). They told the human rights defender that they were looking for Rashid Mahiya and forced him and his family out of their home before raiding it.

Rashid Mahiya was among a number of human rights defenders and activists to have been included on a police ‘wanted’ list in connection with the national strike that took place on 14, 15 and 16 of January. State prosecutors had initially intended to charge the human rights defender with “inciting public violence”, but after failing to link him to the protests that took place in mid-January, the state opted to charge him with “subverting a constitutionally elected government / treason” under Section 22 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act.

Rashid Mahiya’s arrest follows a sustained attack on civil society space in Zimbabwe, particularly since mid-January’s national strike.

Front Line Defenders expresses serious concern at the ongoing detention and judicial harassment of human rights defenders in Zimbabwe and believes that they are being targeted as a result of their legitimate and peaceful defense of human rights in the country.

Front Line Defenders urge the authorities in Zimbabwe to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally drop the charges against Rashid Mahiya and release him from custody, as Front Line Defenders believes that he is being targeted solely as a consequence of his legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. 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.