

13 June 2019

Zimbabwe: Seven human rights defenders facing judicial harassment after attending advocacy training

On 10 June 2019, the High Court of Harare granted bail under very strict conditions to human rights defenders Rita Nyampinga and Stabile Dewa. Their co-detainees George Makoni, Tatenda Mombeyarara, Gamuchirai Mukura, Farirai Gumbonzvanda and Frank Nyasha Mpahlo were granted bail on 7 June 2019. The human rights defenders were arrested at the Robert Mugabe international airport after returning from an international capacity building workshop in the Maldives. They are now awaiting trial.

George Makoni works on local governance with the Centre for Community Development Trust. Nyasha Frank Mpahlo's work with Transparency International Zimbabwe focuses on the issue of corruption. Tatenda Mombeyarara, a member of Citizens Manifesto, in the area of citizen participation. Gamuchirai Mukura, through his work at the Community Tolerance Reconciliation and Development Trust, seeks to contribute to the process of peacebuilding in the country. Farirai Gumbonzvanda is a girls' rights defender and community volunteer at the Rozaria Memorial Trust. Stabile Dewa works on women's rights at the Women's Academy for Leadership and Political Excellence, and Rita Nyampinga promotes the rights of female prisoners through her work with the Female Prisoners Support Trust.

In May 2019, all seven human rights defenders went to the Maldives to attend a training on civil engagement with a focus on effective advocacy and communication strategies, organised by the Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies (CANVAS). They were arrested at the Robert Mugabe international airport after returning from the training. George Makoni, Tatenda Mombeyarara, Gamuchirai Mukura and Frank Nyasha Mpahlo were arrested on 20 May 2019, Farirai Gumbonzvanda was arrested the next day, and Stabile Dewa and Rita Nyampinga were arrested on 27 May 2019. All seven human rights defenders were charged with subverting constitutional government under Article 22(2)(a)(iii) of the Criminal Law Act, and transferred to the Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison.

George Makoni, Tatenda Mombeyarara, Gamuchirai Mukura, Farirai Gumbonzvanda and Frank Nyasha Mpahlo were detained for over 2 weeks in violation of the right to bail. Rita Nyampinga, who is 61 years old, was denied adequate medical care while she needs a chronic medication. On 10 June 2019, the High Court of Harare granted bail to Rita Nyampinga and Stabile Dewa with strict conditions to report everyday at police stations and continuing to reside at the same addresses until the case is finalised. George Makoni, Tatenda Mombeyarara, Gamuchirai Mukura, Farirai Gumbonzvanda and Frank Nyasha Mpahlo were granted bail on 7 June 2019. The human rights defenders are now awaiting trial.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the judicial harassment of George Makoni, Nyasha Frank Mpahlo, Tatenda Mombeyarara, Gamuchirai Mukura, Farirai Gumbonzvanda, Stabile Dewa and Rita Nyampinga, as it is believed to be directly motivated by their peaceful and legitimate human rights activities.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Zimbabwe to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against George Makoni, Tatenda Mombeyarara, Gamuchirai Mukura, Frank Nyasha Mpahlo, Farirai Gumbonzvanda Rita Nyampinga, Stabile Dewa, as they are believed to be solely motivated by their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Zimbabwe and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free from all restrictions, including judicial harassment.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 5: *“For the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at the national and international levels: (a) To meet or assemble peacefully” (b) To form, join and participate in non-governmental organizations, associations or groups (c) To communicate with non-governmental or intergovernmental organizations.”*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson
Executive Director