

October 5, 2011

Honorable Patrick Chinamasa
Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs
New Government Complex
P. Bag 7751, Causeway, Harare
ZIMBABWE
Fax: 011 263 4 772999

RE: Urge for Remand of Women of Zimbabwe Arise activists Jenni Williams and Magodonga Mahlangu

Dear Minister Chinamasa,

We the undersigned representatives of U.S.-based civil rights, human rights, and advocacy organizations write to draw your attention to the continued harassment and intimidation of civil society in breach of protections afforded by Zimbabwe's constitution and international law.

In particular, we are greatly distressed at the prolonged incarceration, following the denial of bail, of Jenni Williams and Magodonga Mahlangu, activist leaders of Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA). The women were arrested on 21 September in Bulawayo while holding a peaceful demonstration commemorating the International Day of Peace and held in prison for 13 days.

The Zimbabwe Constitution affords the right to a speedy and fair trial. We are concerned the two activists may not be accorded these basic rights, as human rights defenders previously arrested on spurious criminal charges have been unreasonably denied bail. This law has been applied selectively in the past against critics of government policies.

We believe the denial of bail was part of an ongoing pattern of harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders in Zimbabwe, and of WOZA members in particular. We urge guarantees for the safety of Jenni Williams and Magodonga Mahlangu, as well as a speedy and fair trial. We further call for the protection of all civil society activists and human rights defenders in Zimbabwe who continue to press the government to adhere to international human rights standards, basic democratic principles, and to improve access to basic services and living conditions.

Sincerely,

Curt Goering, Chief Operating Officer, Amnesty International USA
Lynn Delaney, Executive Director, Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights
David J. Kramer, President, Freedom House
Emira Woods, Co-Director, Institute for Policy Studies
Daniel Bekele, Director Africa Division, Human Rights Watch
Nicole Lee, Esq., President, TransAfrica Forum
Elisa Massimino, President/Chief Executive Officer, Human Rights First
Chair of the Board, Africa Action
Susan Farnsworth, Executive Director, Global Rights
Hans Hogrefe, Washington Director, Physicians for Human Rights
Jeb Gutelius, Executive Director, Calling All Crows
Chad Stokes, Musician, Dispatch and State Radio
Cynthia Ryan, Principal, Schooner Fund

Lisa Veneklausen, Executive Director, Just Associates
Eric Byington, Co-Executive Director, Elias Fund
Carl Gershman, President, National Endowment for Democracy
Art Kaufman, President, World Movement for Democracy

Cc:

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