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HTUR/JS

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Arrest of trade unionists despite recent visit of the ILO Commission of Inquiry on Zimbabwe

Dear Mr. President,

On behalf of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) representing 170 million unionized workers in 157 countries and territories, I am writing to condemn the arrests of 3 activists during a commemoration march on 12 September.

The ITUC has been informed by its affiliate the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) that the Police disrupted a peaceful march organized by the ZCTU to commemorate September 13, 2006. On that day ZCTU leadership and activists were brutally assaulted while in police custody. These included among many others, President Lovemore Matombo, Secretary General Wellington Chibebe, 1st Vice President Lucia Matibenga and 2nd Vice President George Nkiwane. To this day many still bear the scars of the torture and some have become permanently disabled.

The police had initially written to the ZCTU banning the gathering and accused the ZCTU of trying to scuttle the National Healing Process by commemorating this day. Even after the High Court issued an order allowing the commemoration, police went ahead with disrupting proceedings despite being provided with the High Court Order. In denying the ZCTU permission to hold the gathering the police had indicated that they did not have enough manpower to control the crowds but on Saturday, there were hundreds of armed riot police. Three activists were arrested and later released without any charge.

The ITUC is alarmed at the ban, the ensuing repression of the peaceful gathering and the arrests, which are directly contrary to repeated assurances from the inclusive government that it is committed to human rights reform. Only a few months ago, the co-Minister of Home Affairs, Giles Mutsekwa announced that there was no ban on peaceful gatherings, marches or protests.

The ITUC is particularly alarmed that trade unionists were arrested and prevented from carrying out their activities peacefully in light of the ongoing ILO Commission of Inquiry into violations of fundamental workers rights. The repression this past Saturday shows that trade union rights violations are not limited to the past, but remain a pressing problem in Zimbabwe.

The ITUC will inform the Commission of Inquiry of this serious violation of ILO convention no. 87 on freedom of association and the right to organise.

I wish to remind you that the ILO Constitution was used to reflect the serious nature of violations in Zimbabwe, and the ITUC firmly believes that your Government would do well to avoid further occurrences.

The ITUC strongly urges you to actively begin fully respecting the rights of workers, if your government wants to convince the international community that it is indeed committed to human rights reform.

The ITUC hope that you will pay prompt attention to this very serious matter and looks forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

General Secretary

Cc: Prime Minister
Minister of Labour and Social Welfare
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs
The Embassy of Zimbabwe to Belgium