**EMBARGO: 4 FEBRUARY 2020**

**Zimbabwe: government’s international reputation in the balance as it puts workers’ rights defenders on trial**

Nineteen of the twenty-eight trade unionists still on trial in Zimbabwe are set to appear soon in front of courts across the country as the government pursues its repressive tactics in the courtroom. Trade unionists have been in the government’s crosshairs following a 2018 call for a peaceful work-stoppage in response to escalating living costs. The international trade union movement calls for an end to the persecution.

During their prolonged trial, Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions’ (ZCTU) General Secretary Japhet Moyo and President Peter Mutasa were called to appear before judges no less than 19 times. All charges were eventually dropped, notably following international trade union pressure, including through diplomatic channels and through mobilisations outside Zimbabwe’s embassies. However, many grassroots trade unionists remain subject to long-drawn-out trials as a battle for the judicial independence continues, in the face of the government’s politically motivated attacks.

“From violent repression to prolonged legal harassment, the government's aim remains to intimidate, discourage and sap the energy of the trade union movement. Their refusal to engage constructively and take on board the interests of working people in decision-making is driving profound distrust across society in Zimbabwe. It seems that the government hasn’t yet realised that, as well as the freedom of trade unions, these cases are putting its own reputation amongst the international community on trial. It is never too late to change course: unions remain committed to a dialogue that respects people’s freedom of association and of assembly and to ensuring that the government governs for the people,” said Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary.

Those on trial today hail from across the trade union movement, including the women’s and youth sections. Amongst the twenty-eight still on trial, eight are energy sector representatives who are facing criminal charges for protesting the non-payment of wages.

Florence Taruvinga, ZCTU Vice-President, is also amongst those on trial. She said: “The ability of working people to have a fair representation is truly undermined. If the government dedicated even half the resources they are using in attempts to shut trade unions down, to actually engage them positively, we would be able to make real progress. The fact that women and youth members, groups that are under-represented, are also facing trial highlights the depth of the disregard the government is showing to an inclusive approach.”

The international trade union movement remains in full solidarity with ZCTU, and national trade unions across the world are again raising the issue with Zimbabwe representatives as well as their own governments.

Further information:

* [Zimbabwe police target trade union leaders in civil rights crackdown](https://www.ituc-csi.org/Trade-Unionists-Arrest-Civil-Right-Crackdown-Crisis-Zimbabwe)
* [ITUC Africa General Secretary detained in Harare](https://www.ituc-csi.org/ITUC-Africa-General-Secretary-detained-Zimbabwe)
* [See the resource page for trade union solidarity initiatives](http://www.ituc-csi.org/Zimbabwe-solidarity-2020)