The Minster

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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4 February 2020

Dear Honourable Minister,

I am writing on behalf of ……………………………, which represents ………………. workers in this country, to request that our government take immediate measures to exert pressure on the government of Zimbabwe to respect human and labour rights and implement the recommendations of the ILO Committee on the Application of Standards (CAS) made in Geneva in June 2019.

Honourable Minister, we also remain concerned by the continuing deteriorating cost of living standards of the workers and the people of Zimbabwe due to failed austerity measures adopted by the government of Zimbabwe; we are equally concerned by the continued harassment of trade unionists demanding socio-economic justice.

The repression of its own people by the government of Zimbabwe is outrageous. The hope that accompanied the fall of the Mugabe regime has turned to despair, anger and anxiety as working families pick up the bill for President Mnangagwa’s failing economic policies. Salaries cannot keep up with inflation and are driving working families into poverty. The government must put an immediate end to the repressive violence against protestors and sit down with unions to find a peaceful solution. In the current environment, Zimbabwe can never fulfil its commitment under the UN Sustainable Development Goal No. 8 (decent work and economic growth).

One year on, after the release from jail of Peter Mutasa and Japhet Moyo (Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions [ZCTU] President and Secretary General, respectively), we remain concerned by the ongoing persecution of trade unionists, including Dickson Chaeruka and 18 others arrested by State security forces in Mutare on 11 October 2018 following a ZCTU protest action against the introduction of the transaction tax on money transfers. The 19 ZCTU members have appeared in court more than 11 times and are set to appear in court again today.

We are also concerned by the continued persecution of eight union officials from the Energy Sector Workers Union of Zimbabwe (ESWUZ), an affiliate of the ZCTU, arrested in March 2018 during a hearing at the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA) after their suspension from work following a strike over non-implementation of a collective bargaining agreement.

Mr Thomas Masvingwe, General Secretary of the National Energy Workers Union of Zimbabwe (NEWUZ), is also facing criminal charges since March 2018 for leading a strike against ZESA. Furthermore, the ZCTU 2nd Vice President, Mr John Chirenda, remains dismissed by the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) for representing workers at that workplace.

The ILO CAS recommended, among others, that the government of Zimbabwe “refrain from the arrest, detention or engagement in violence, intimidation or harassment of trade union members conducting lawful trade union activities and accept a direct contact mission of the ILO to assess progress before June 2020”.

Furthermore, in 1919, the ILO observed that “the failure of any nation to adopt humane conditions of labour is an obstacle in the way of other nations which desire to improve the conditions in their own countries”; hence, our call for intervention. The government of Zimbabwe must take urgent measures to:

1. Amend all pieces of legislation including the Criminal Law Codification and Reform Act, the Maintenance of Peace and Order Act, the Labour Act, the Public Service Act, and the Health Services Act to comply with UN standards on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, taking into account the recommendations of the UN Joint report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions on the proper management of assemblies, 2016 (A/HRC/31/66);
2. Align legislation and put into practice the principles of the ILO Conventions on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise, 1948 (C87) and the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining, 1949 (C98);
3. Implement the recommendations of the ILO Committee on the Application of Standards (CAS) adopted by the International Labour Conference in June 2019, including accepting an ILO Direct Contact Mission to assess progress in this regard;
4. Embrace a culture of social dialogue in the development of socio-economic policies through the Tripartite Negotiating Forum (TNF);
5. Respect the rule of law and human rights;
6. Accept United Nations (UN) intervention or mediation in settling the internal political problems of Zimbabwe with the participation of labour unions and civil society broadly to agree on the way forward for the country.

We hope and trust that you will take the necessary measures to address our concerns, and we remain available for further information or engagement in this respect.

Yours faithfully,

General Secretary

cc: Ministry of Labour

Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU): info@zctu.co.zw