

20 August 2020

Zimbabwe: Judicial harassment of human rights lawyer Beatrice Mtetwa

On 18 August 2020, human rights defender lawyer **Beatrice Mtetwa** was barred from representing the detained journalist and human rights defender Hopewell Chin'ono at the Harare Magistrate Court. The Zimbabwean magistrate Ngoni Nduna ordered that the woman human rights defender should be charged with contempt of court.

[Beatrice Mtetwa](#) is a human rights lawyer and a member of Zimbabwean Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR). She has represented many human rights defenders, journalists and opposition figures and as a result of this work has been targeted and subjected to intimidation and harassment. She has been awarded numerous distinctions such as the International Women of Courage Award in 2014 and the 2010 International Human Rights award of the American Bar Association.

On 18 August 2020, at a hearing to discuss the conditional release of detained human rights defender and journalist [Hopewell Chin'ono](#), the magistrate Ngoni Nduna barred Beatrice Mtetwa from representing her client, who she has represented since he was detained on 20 July 2020. Journalist Hopewell Chin'ono is currently [detained](#) at Harare Central police station and has been charged with 'incitement to commit public violence' in relation to posts he made on social media, calling on citizens to participate in anti-corruption demonstrations that took place on 31 July around the country.

The magistrate Ngoni Nduna ordered that Beatrice Mtetwa be charged with contempt of court in relation to comments about the case that were posted on a Facebook page. The page is run by a filmmaker who produced a documentary about the human rights lawyer's work. The filmmaker has made several posts on the page stating she is the owner and author, and that Beatrice Mtetwa does not operate the page, nor has she ever posted on the page. The lawyers representing the State alleged that the comments, calling on the international community to speak out against Hopewell Chin'ono's imprisonment, were made by Beatrice Mtetwa.

Magistrate Ngoni Nduna declared that he will refer his ruling to the Law Society of Zimbabwe for possible further punishment of the human rights lawyer. Beatrice Mtetwa will appeal the ruling by Magistrate Ngoni Nduna.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned by the court's decision to bar Beatrice Mtetwa from representing Hopewell Chin'ono and the charges of contempt of court brought against her. Front Line Defenders strongly believes that she has been targeted and subject to judicial harassment solely for her peaceful and legitimate human rights activities.

Front Line Defenders is also concerned that the magistrate's decision deprives human rights defender Hopewell Chin'ono of his constitutional right to a lawyer of his choice and is in violation of his constitutional right to a free trial.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Zimbabwe to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against Beatrice Mtetwa, dismiss the court's ruling barring her from representing Hopewell Chin'ono and cease all judicial harassment against her as Front Line Defenders believes that she has been targeted for her legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Immediately and unconditionally release Hopewell Chin'ono, and cease all further harassment towards him, as Front Line Defenders believes that he was arbitrarily arrested and is currently detained as a result of his peaceful and legitimate human rights activities;
3. Ensure that the treatment of Hopewell Chin'ono while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the 'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Zimbabwe are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.

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