

23 December 2019

## **Zambian HRD Pilato Arrested During Youth Forum; Laura Miti and Bornwell Mwewa Arrested When Attempting to Help**

On Saturday, 21 December 2019, Zambian human rights defender and musician, Pilato (Fumba Chama) was ordered to a Livingstone police station following a Youth Insaka (forum), under the banner, #BeHeardZambia, aiming to raise awareness and educate youth in the country about governance, corruption and civic responsibility. He has been charged with unlawful assembly in violation of the Public Order Act. He was released on bond on Monday, 23 December.

Just prior to his arrest, Pilato posted on social media: “I have been picked up again by the police but this time they came with cadres. The officers have been instructed to charge me with unlawful assembly. They are now taking me to the Livingstone central Police.”

Upon the news of Pilato’s arrest, fellow HRDs, [Laura Miti](#) and [Bornwell Mwewa](#), from the Alliance for Community Action (ACA), drove from Lusaka to Livingstone to try to negotiate for Pilato’s release. Upon arrival at the police station, they too were detained. They were brought to court on Monday, 23 December for a hearing with a magistrate judge, at which they were charged with disorderly conduct and assaulting a police officer. They were then released on bond. While in detention, Laura Miti suffered a severe asthma attack due to the unsanitary conditions and was taken to hospital for treatment.

The trial for Laura Miti and Bornwell Mwewa is scheduled for 13 January 2020.

Pilato is a rap artist and social activist based in Ndola, Copperbelt Province, who focuses his music and activism on corruption and the rights of the poor and marginalized. Laura Miti serves as Executive Director for the Alliance for Community Action (ACA), an organisation which works to grow the demand for Public Resource Accountability in the Zambian public. Bornwell Mwewa is the Programmes Manager at ACA.

The Zambian Network for Human Rights Defenders [released a statement](#) about the detentions, insisting on the release of the HRDs.

In 2018, Front Line Defenders released [Creeping Towards Authoritarianism?, a report](#) examining the warning signs of attacks on civil society and human rights defenders in Zambia in the context of increased corruption, rising debt, a polarised political environment and the capture of state institutions by a ruling party and elite. Both Pilato and Laura have been arrested previously for organising protests against corruption, though they, and other HRDs, were acquitted in a trial in which it was revealed that the evidence was insufficient for the charges (see TrialWatch [Fairness Report](#)).

Front Line Defenders condemns the arrest and detention of these Zambian HRDs in violation of their rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression, and

1. demands that the charges against Pilato, Laura Miti and Bornwell Mwewa to be immediately quashed;

2. calls for the Zambian authorities to move quickly to reform the Public Order Act to ensure that it is in line with the rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression as guaranteed by the Zambian Constitution and international obligations

3. to ensure that Zambian HRDs are free to conduct their legitimate work without harassment from the police or other security officials, including the inappropriate application of the Public Order Act.