

14 January 2021

Zimbabwe: Arrest of sixteen human rights defenders and members of the Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (ARTUZ)

On 12 January 2021, sixteen human rights defenders and members of the **Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (ARTUZ)** were arrested during a protest in Harare, in Zimbabwe. They have been charged with participating in a gathering with intention to promote public violence, bigotry and breaches of peace, as defined in Section 37(1)(a) of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act. The human rights defenders are currently being detained at the Harare Remand Prison and Chikurubi Prison. A bail application has been lodged today 17 January 2022 and awaiting a court decision.

The [Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe \(ARTUZ\)](#) is a registered Trade Union with about about 35,000 members working to defend the right to education and labour rights of teachers in rural areas of Zimbabwe. ARTUZ advocates for the government to address the challenges of low wages and poor working conditions that rural teachers have to endure, as well as advocating for decent accommodation and trainings.

On 12 January 2022, ARTUZ members and leaders were peacefully protesting against poor wages in front of the offices of the National Social Security Authority (NSSA), where a National Joint Negotiating Committee was holding a dialogue on the topic of teachers' working conditions. The human rights defenders were protesting to demand the restoration of the pre-October 2018 salaries of about \$540 USD and above, and better learning facilities for students ahead of schools opening. The peaceful protest was violently interrupted by police officers. Among the protesters who were arrested, there are prominent ARTUZ figures, including the leader of the union [Obert Masaraure](#), and Mash West Provincial Chairperson Munyaradzi Ndawana. The members and leaders of ARTUZ have been targeted by Zimbabwean authorities for a long time.

On 15 December 2018, ARTUZ human rights defenders were arrested during a protest for the adoption of a living wage by the government. They were detained with the charge of engaging in an illegal protest. On 17 December 2018, the National Prosecuting Authority refused to prosecute them noting that they had not violated the law.

On 16 January 2019, ARTUZ Secretary General, Robson Chere, was abducted at Arcturus High School, in Harare, where he is employed as a teacher by members of the Military Intelligence. The kidnappers accused him of being involved in the mobilization of the protests against fuel increases of 14 to 16 January 2019. Robson Chere was later taken to Goromonzi Police Station, where he was charged with intimidating and assaulting members of the Military. On 18 January 2019, armed members of the Military Intelligence abducted and tortured ARTUZ National President, Obert Masaraure, at his home in Harare around midnight. After being tortured he was handed over to the police at Harare Central Police Station.

On 27 April 2019, during a meeting in Greystone Park, in Harare, human rights defenders and teachers Robson Chere, Jess Drury, Precious Ndlovu and Munyaradzi Ndawana were abducted by a group of individuals in plain clothes, suspected to be state security agents. They were then taken

to the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) section of Harare Central Police Station, where they were interrogated about their human rights activities. They were released later on the same day with charges of crimes against public order.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the pattern of violations against ARTUZ and its members started in December 2018.

Front Line Defender urges the authorities of Zimbabwe to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against the sixteen ARTUZ members, as it is believed that they are solely motivated by their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Immediately and unconditionally release the sixteen ARTUZ members;
3. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Zimbabwe, and 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.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 5: *“For the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at the national and international levels: (a) To meet or assemble peacefully”* and Article 12 (2): *“The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threat, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.”*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson

Executive Director