

THE OBSERVATORY

for the Protection
of Human Rights Defenders

a joint programme



INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION
OF JURISTS

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PRESS RELEASE

Geneva - Paris, 15 June 2006

ZIMBABWE:

Human Rights Organisations to observe "Voice of the People" Radio trial

The trial of the six trustees of the independent radio station "Voice of the People" (VOP), begins today at the Magistrates' Court, Rotten Row, Harare. The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) and the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (OBSERVATORY), a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), have sent a trial observer to monitor whether the proceedings comply with international standards for fair trial and whether the charges comply with international human rights law.

The trial takes place against a background of alleged irregularities in the handling of the case by the investigating police. These include reports that investigating police assaulted an employee of Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), an organisation chaired by one of the VOP Trustees, Mr. Arnold Tsunga, and arbitrarily detained employees of two of the VOP trustees in order to compel those trustees to present themselves to the police for arrest. Mr. Arnold Tsunga, who was a co-recipient of the 2006 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders*, is also Chairman of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (Zimrights). Zimrights was recently informed of a serious threat to Mr. Arnold Tsunga's life.

The ICJ and the OBSERVATORY have mandated Mr. Ronald Selvan SC, a distinguished South African lawyer and acting Judge, to attend the hearing and monitor whether or not the accused receive a fair trial, before an independent and impartial tribunal, as required by international human rights law. The ICJ and the OBSERVATORY call on the Zimbabwean Government to ensure that international observers are able to attend the trial without any hindrances.

Background

On 25 January 2006, six VOP trustees, Mr. David Masunda, Mr. Arnold Tsunga, Mr. Lawrence Chibwe, Mr. Nhlanhla Ngwenya, Mr. Millicent Phiri and Ms. Isabella Matambanadzo, were arrested and charged with broadcasting without a license, a charge carrying a penalty of up to two years imprisonment. The accused are currently free on bail. A preliminary hearing was held on 28 February 2006, at which a Magistrate decided not to accept the defence's submission that there was insufficient evidence to send the case to full trial.

For further information, please contact:

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See also ICJ Press Releases dated 9 and 28 February 2006 at www.icj.org and Observatory Urgent Appeal ZWE 001/0106/OBS 011, dated 27 January 2006 at www.omct.org and www.fidh.org.

* The Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders (MEA), created in 1993, is a unique collaboration among eleven of the world's leading non-governmental human rights organisations to give protection to human rights defenders worldwide. The Jury is composed of the following: Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Human Rights First, FIDH, OMCT, the ICJ, Diakonie Germany, International Service for Human Rights, International Alert, Front Line, and Huridocs. Mr. Arnold Tsunga shares the 2006 MEA with the Iranian human rights defender Mr. Akbar Ganji.