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‘Jailed for protesting’ read one of the posters at the Vigil as we gathered in outrage at the arrest of Pastor Evan Mawarire, leader of #ThisFlag movement who was pounced on by a gaggle of CIO people at Harare airport when he arrived back on Tuesday.

BIZARRE seems to be the headline of choice for some websites to grab your attention. The scoop may be ‘goblins having sex with teachers in school’ or ‘Zimbabwean musician videos himself committing suicide’ or maybe ‘woman gives birth to frog baby’.

Well here’s the Vigil’s ‘scoop’. Human rights activist faces 20 years in jail for saying he doesn’t like the government – that is, if he is lucky.

Evan astonished everyone by his decision to return only six months after fleeing with his family to safety in the United States – defying divisive rumours fostered by the CIO. Why did he return? Surely it couldn’t be that he is a brave man acting out of love for his country? He must have known what he faced.

His lawyer Fadzayi Mahere posted: *‘Pastor Evan Mawarire has been classified as a “D” Class remand prisoner and is being detained at Chikurubi Prison where convicted murderers are held, instead of the normal remand holding centre. This is not about Pastor E as an individual but it’s a battle for the soul of Zimbabwe. Are we a constitutional democracy – where free speech, free assembly, free conscience and political rights are respected – or not? Do we speak out? Do we choose apathy? Do we hold onto disappointment that he chose family over fame – or do we rally behind what his incarceration represents for us as a country? Police cells are awful. Remand prison is inhuman. Chikurubi serious crimes section is hell.’*

Evan can be comforted by the victory of protesters in Romania. Earlier this week hundreds of thousands gathered in the capital Bucharest and other cities to protest at a government decree allowing those guilty of corruption involving less than about \$50,000 to escape prison.

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Romanians were proud that their notoriously corrupt bureaucracy had been steadily cleaning up its act since joining the European Union. They weren't persuaded by the government's insistence that the decree was for the best and duly turned out to protest the next night, and again the following night. Now the government has given in.

Hopefully Evan and people like him will see this same happy outcome in Zimbabwe. If he survives. The Vigil notes that a senior British diplomat has just been in Zimbabwe to see the situation for herself. We hope she will get the British government to tell Mugabe: if Evan dies in prison so do British diplomatic ties with Zimbabwe.

Vigil founder member and President of ROHR Ephraim Tapa told the Vigil that, with less than 18 months before the next elections, Zimbabwean activists should brace themselves for more persecution, abductions, torture and imprisonment. The Vigil displayed a poster from a ROHR supporter in Harare, Linda Masarira, who has launched a campaign for #21daysofactivism demanding changes every day until Mugabe's birthday.

Other points

- Vigil supporters in the UK were amused to read in the UK Times newspaper : '**After you, Mr Mugabe**

: Priti Patel, the international development secretary, was left circling at Addis Ababa airport far beyond her scheduled arrival time on Saturday evening. The minister was dropping in on some UK aid projects in Ethiopia and timed her visit to coincide with the African Union summit and cram in a couple of bilateral meetings. What she hadn't counted on was landing at the same time as Robert Mugabe. Naturally, the Zimbabwean kleptocrat was granted priority as well as the full red carpet treatment. When Ms Patel's plane eventually set down, she had to make her own way across the tarmac. There are some things aid can't buy, it seems.'

- We were glad to have with us Brighton Chireka, a founder member of the Vigil, now a busy doctor.

- Thanks to those who arrived early to help set up: Rashiwe Bayisayi, Muchineripi (Ebson) Chigwedere, Flemming Diza, Linda Dodzo, Sibongile Kadzima, Jean Kawara, Fungayi Mabhunu, Alice Majola, Nancy Makurira, Allen Mandaza, Theodora Mandishaya, Jenniffer Maritsa, Edna Mdoka, Gladys Meck, Darlington Mlambo, Benjamin Molife, Sharon Moyo, Eletha Mpofo, Tinotenda Mrewa, Roseline Mukucha, Alfredy Mukuvare, Simbarashe Mutero, Nontokozo Ncube, Mduduzi Ndlovu, Tsitsi Ngoro, Chipo Parirenyatwa, Aivet Phiri, Newman Richard, Tawanda Rusape, Rumbidzayi Sambana, Douglas Tavengwa and Maureen Tavengwa. Thanks to Roseline, Cathrine Musa, Gladys, Nontokozo and Sharon for looking after the front table, to Chipo, Sibongile, Maureen and Rosemary Maponga for handing out flyers and selling wristbands and to Alfredy, Mduduzi, Newman, Tinotenda, Simbarashe, Tawanda and

Darlington for putting up the banners.

For latest Vigil pictures check: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/zimbabwewigil/> . Please note: Vigil photos can only be downloaded from our Flickr website. The facebook page for our sister organisation Restoration of Human Rights in Zimbabwe (ROHR) (<https://www.facebook.com/ROHR-Zimbabwe-Restoration-of-Human-Rights-301811392835>) has been hijacked by destructive elements from a group calling itself ZHRO. Please be advised that any postings on this page are not posted by ROHR.

FOR THE RECORD: 68 signed the register.

EVENTS AND NOTICES:

- **ROHR Southampton branch meeting.** Wednesday 8th February from 12 noon – 1 pm for committee meeting and from 1 – 3 pm for general members meeting. Venue: Eastleigh Library, Swan Shopping and Leisure Centre, Swan Centre, Eastleigh SO50 5SF. Contact: Ben Semwayo (Chair) 07401611932, Grace Rukure (Secretary) 07462103397 and Reuben Waretza (Publicity and Advocacy) 07946 607 617.

- **ROHR Leicester branch general meeting.** Saturday 11th February from 2 – 4 pm. Venue: the Salvation Army New Parks, 330 Aikman Avenue, Leicester LE3 9PW. Contact: Enniah Dube 07403439707, Yvonne Makombe 07453909247 and Moline Nyabonda 07961250525.

- **ROHR Central London branch meeting.** Saturday 11th February from 11.30 am – 1.30 pm. Venue: Royal Festival Hall, Southbank Centre, Belvedere Road, London SE1 8XX. Contact: Daisy Fabian 07708653640, Maxmus Savanhu 07397809056, Siphon Ndlovu 07400566013.

- **ROHR Slough branch meeting.** Saturday 11th February from 11 am – 1 pm. Venue: Upton Lea Community Centre, Wexham Road, Slough, SL2 5JW. For further information contact Patricia Masamba (Chair) 07708116625, Fungisai Mupandira (Organising Secretary) 07758958803, Sharon Zimuto (Publicity and Advocacy) 07950837841.

- **The Restoration of Human Rights in Zimbabwe (ROHR)** is the Vigil's partner organization based in Zimbabwe. ROHR grew out of the need for the Vigil to have an organization on the ground in Zimbabwe which reflected the Vigil's mission statement in a practical way. ROHR in the UK actively fundraises through membership subscriptions, events, sales etc to support the activities of ROHR in Zimbabwe. Please note that the official website of ROHR Zimbabwe is <http://www.rohrzimbabwe.org/>

. Any other website claiming to be the official website of ROHR in no way represents us.

- **Monthly Itai Dzamara protest.** Saturday 11th February. From 2 – 6 pm outside the

BIZARRE: Pastor arrested – Zimbabwe Vigil Diary: 4th February 2017

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Zimbabwe Embassy. The protest is to mark twenty-three months since Itai's abduction by intelligence agents.

- **Swaziland Vigil.** Saturday 18th February from 10 am to 1 pm outside the Swaziland High Commission, 20 Buckingham Gate, London SW1E 6LB.

- **Zimbabwe Action Forum (ZAF).** Saturday 18th February from 6.30 pm. Venue: to be advised. ZAF meets regularly after the Vigil to discuss ways to help those back in Zimbabwe to fight oppression and achieve true democracy.

- **Zimbabwe Yes We Can Movement** holds meetings in London as the political face of ROHR and the Vigil.

- **Zimbabwe Vigil Highlights 2016** can be viewed on this link: <http://www.zimvigil.co.uk/vigil-news/campaign-news/843-zimbabwe-vigil-highlights-2016>

. Links to previous years' highlights are listed on 2016 Highlights page.

- **Facebook pages:Vigil:** <https://www.facebook.com/zimbabwevigil> ROHR: <https://www.facebook.com/Restoration-of-Human-Rights-ROHR-Zimbabwe-International-370825706588551/>

ZAF:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Zimbabwe-Action-Forum-ZAF/49025705102751>

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