

Tortured Zimbabwean opposition MP Joanah Mamombe sent back to jail

Written by Administrator
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Jane Flanagan 14/04/2021

A female opposition MP in Zimbabwe was returned to jail following her 129th appearance in court in a 12-month campaign of persecution that began with her kidnap and torture by state thugs.

The targeting of Joanah Mamombe, 27, who is serving her seventh prison stretch in the space of a year, is seen as typical of the regime of President Mnangagwa which is now more feared than the era of Robert Mugabe it replaced. In a letter to her mother smuggled out of her cell, Mamombe said that she was “even ready to die for this struggle” against the state’s harsh and unrelenting attack on dissent.

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Mamombe, the MP for Harare West, has spent the past 40 days in custody with Cecilia Chimhiri, an activist from her party, the Movement for Democratic Change Alliance. The pair were arrested for allegedly breaching coronavirus regulations when they spoke in public about another colleague's detention. Kudzayi Chiwanza, the MP's mother, said that the torment was taking its toll.

"I am not OK, I am in terrible shape. You can't sleep or be fine when your child is being tortured like this," she told *The Times* from Harare magistrates' court following yesterday's latest failed bail application.

It was her daughter's winning of a plum constituency in the capital in 2018 that put her in the sights of the government, Chiwanza, 49, a university lecturer, said.

"Her victory humiliated the government and they've punished her ever since," she said.

The campaign to get elected was violent, Chiwanza added, but "I thought once she was a parliamentarian, they would accept it. But it has just got worse."

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Last May Mamombe, Chimbiri and Netsai Marova, a third MDC colleague, were found dumped, partially clothed and “with horrendous tales of torture and abuse” on the edge of the city two days after they were arrested for protesting over food shortages.

The three women were accused of inventing their story of sexual abuse and gross humiliations, including being forced to eat human excreta. They were later dragged from their hospital beds to appear before a makeshift court accused of organising an illegal demonstration. Rights groups said that the treatment of the women typified an intolerance of critics by Mnangagwa, 78, who came to power after a military coup in 2017.

Dewa Mavhinga, the southern Africa director at Human Rights Watch, said that the targeting of Mamombe was “a classic example of how this government has gone rogue and now uses state security institutions to harass, abuse and intimidate activists in order to silence legitimate activism and stifle freedoms in the country”.

In addition to the arrest and jailing of opposition MPs, dozens more parliamentarians have been expelled from parliament. The headquarters of the Movement for Democratic Change has been seized and by-elections have been postponed indefinitely.

Last week, police beat journalists with batons and broke up an opposition party’s press conference after another activist, Makomborero Haruzivishe, 29, was jailed on conviction of inciting violence and resisting arrest. Witnesses said that Haruzivishe’s crime had been to blow

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a whistle to support a group of street vendors in Harare who were being rounded up and arrested by police.