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His Excellency the President of Zimbabwe

Charges against newspaper editor a serious violation of human rights

Your Excellency

We are extremely distressed by the decision of your government to arrest and bring criminal charges against newspaper editor, Mr. Davison Maruziva. We understand that Mr. Maruziva's crime was to publish an article by a contributor, Arthur Mutambara, in which Mr. Mutambara expressed concern over the delay in releasing the results of the Zimbabwe Presidential Elections held on the 29th March 2008.

We understand that Mr. Maruziva is accused of publishing or communicating comments that your Government believes to be prejudicial to the State and in contempt of the court, for which if convicted, Mr. Maruziva faces a sentence of up to 20 years in prison.

Your Excellency, with the utmost respect, we wish to submit that publishing a citizen's comments on the ruling by the courts is the right of every citizen. In our view, Professor Arthur Mutambara, the author of the article merely said that in his view, the court erred. This is a legitimate comment that should be perfectly legal.

We believe that Zimbabwe is a democracy. However by of bringing criminal charges against journalists and members of the public who express themselves through the press, Zimbabwe is violating one of the key tenets of democracy - the right to freely exchange information and the right of the media to impart such information.

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We are also disappointed Your Excellency that your government has reneged on commitments made as part of the SADC elections mediation efforts in Zimbabwe, to remove draconian laws, including removing undue restrictions on the independent press. We note that in fact, Zimbabwean authorities have tightened their stranglehold, specifically against the independent media. This action is at variance with regional democratic norms and conduct.

Your Excellency, SAEF believes that public scrutiny of the exercise of power is fundamental to democracy. We are committed to the protection of the right of the public to be unformed. It is also our duty to raise public awareness and ensure that no journalist should be arrested for his legitimate responsibility.

Accordingly, we implore the Government of Zimbabwe to withdraw the charges against both Mr. Maruziva and Mr. Matambara, and in doing so, restore the dignity and respect of your country which is seriously eroded by this act of wanton abuse of human rights. The arrest of a newspaper editor for publishing a legitimate public comment by a citizen of his country is a gross violation of the freedom of the press which is enshrined under Article 19 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. The Zimbabwe elections are a universal public concern. It is the duty of the press to inform the public and provide a platform for citizens to express all legitimate views.

May we wish to assure you of our highest consideration at all times and look forward to the speedy resolution of this matter.

Yours Respectfully



J E Matsebula
SECRETARY GENERAL

His Excellency Robert Gabriel Mugabe
President
REPUBLIC OF ZIMBABWE