

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

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Zimbabwe: Under Government Pressure, Court Denies Bail to Union Leaders Adopted as Amnesty International Prisoners of Conscience

Brussels, 14 May 2008 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC today criticised a Magistrate's decision on 12 May to keep trade union leaders Lovemore Matombo and Wellington Chibebi in detention in Harare Remand Prison until 23 May. The decision followed threats made by the Mugabe regime to overrule the court's decision if it granted bail to the union leaders, President and General Secretary respectively of the ITUC-affiliated Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions. Matombo and Chibebi have been adopted by Amnesty International as prisoners of conscience. An appeal against the decision is to be heard in the Zimbabwe High Court on Thursday morning.

The two were arrested and interrogated for six hours, after voluntarily attending a police station on 8 May after armed police raided their homes (see <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article2107>). The arrests arise from May Day speeches made by Mothombo and Chibebi.

"Yet again, the Mugabe regime is showing blatant disregard for the rule of law and fundamental trade union rights enshrined in International Labour Organisation Conventions. The international trade union movement condemns this latest act of aggression by the Zimbabwean authorities, which is intended to keep Robert Mugabe and his close cohort of hardline supporters in power in defiance of the will of the Zimbabwean people", said ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder.

Mugabe's ZANU-PF party is now seeking to delay a conclusion to the country's Presidential elections, which Robert Mugabe is widely understood to have lost to opposition MDC candidate Morgan Tsvangirai. Earlier this month, Southern African trade unions affiliated to the International Transport Workers' Federation and the ITUC stopped a shipment of Chinese weapons and munitions reaching the Mugabe regime in a demonstration of trade union solidarity, backed by civil society organisations in the region campaigning for democracy and human rights in Zimbabwe.

The ITUC is also concerned that the decision forms part of a strategy by the regime to stop the ZCTU leaders taking part in the ILO's International Labour Conference which starts at the end of this month. Last year, the Zimbabwe government refused to appear before the Committee on the Application of Standards at the Conference, which is one of the key components of the ILO's supervisory mechanisms which oversee compliance by countries to ILO Conventions which they have ratified.

The ITUC represents 168 million workers in 155 countries and territories and has 311 national affiliates. Website: <http://www.ituc-csi.org>

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