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Second UA: 29/25 Index: AFR 46/9385/2025 Zimbabwe of May 16, 2025

ZIMBABWE JOURNALIST FREED AFTER 72 DAYS: CHARGES STILL PENDING

On May 7, Zimbabwean journalist Blessed Mhlanga was granted provisional release after spending 72 days in detention. He was arrested on February 24 and charged with “transmitting data messages that incite violence or damage to property.”

The charges came shortly after Mhlanga conducted an interview with a war veteran and former senior official of the ruling ZANU-PF party. In the interview, the guest openly criticized President Emmerson Mnangagwa.

Blessed Mhlanga’s prosecution is unjust. It violates Zimbabwe’s Constitution and the country’s obligations under international human rights law, which protect freedom of expression and press freedom. The Zimbabwean authorities must drop all charges against him immediately.

Write to the Prosecutor General urging her to:

- Immediately and unconditionally drop all charges against Blessed Mhlanga.
- Uphold and respect the human rights of everyone in Zimbabwe, including the right to freedom of expression.
- Ensure full respect for media freedom, in line with Zimbabwe’s Constitution and the international human rights treaties to which Zimbabwe is a signatory.

Write to:

Honorable Loyce Matanda-Moyo
Prosecutor General
National Prosecuting Authority of Zimbabwe
101 Kwame Nkrumah Ave
Harare, Zimbabwe
Email: corporateaffairs@npa.gov.zw
X: @NPAZim
Salutation: Honorable Loyce Matanda-Moyo

And copy:

His Excellency Cecil Toendepi Chinenerere
Ambassador
Embassy of the Republic of Zimbabwe
332 Somerset Street West
Ottawa, ON K2P 0J9
Tel: (613) 421-1242 Fax: (613) 422-7403
Email: zimfaottawa@gmail.com

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On February 21, Zimbabwean police issued a call for information on the whereabouts of journalist Blessed Mhlanga, accusing him of violating Section 164 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act. Mhlanga voluntarily presented himself to the police on February 24, where he was arrested and charged under the Cyber and Data Protection Act for “transmitting data messages that incite violence or damage to property.”

Despite multiple bail applications and a rejected High Court appeal, Mhlanga was finally released following a successful second appeal. His trial, originally scheduled for May 14, has been postponed to June 17. If convicted, he faces a fine or up to 10 years in prison.

Mhlanga’s arrest appears to be retaliation for interviews he conducted with Blessed Geza, a war veteran and former senior member of the ruling ZANU-PF party. In these interviews, held on January 27 and February 11, Geza criticized President Mnangagwa and called for his resignation over corruption and economic mismanagement.

This is not Mhlanga’s first brush with harassment. In May 2022, he was arrested while reporting on the detention of former opposition MP Job Sikhala. Despite identifying himself as a journalist, he was allegedly punched by police, his phone was destroyed, and he was charged with “disorderly conduct” before being acquitted.

Journalists in Zimbabwe continue to face intimidation, violence, and arbitrary arrests. On March 18, investigative journalist Watson Munyaka was reportedly abducted and later found dead in Marondera, with signs of having been thrown from a moving vehicle. Munyaka was known for reporting on corruption and political affairs.

These attacks occur despite Zimbabwe’s Constitution, adopted in 2013, guaranteeing freedom of expression and media freedom. As a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, Zimbabwe has a legal duty to uphold these rights and to ensure a safe environment for independent journalism.

Please take action as soon as possible until September 18, 2025. The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.