



18 March 2013, YAOUNDE, CAMEROON

PAN AFRICAN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK (PAHRD Net) STATEMENT ON BEATRICE MTETWA ARREST

Human rights defenders (HRDs) meeting in Cameroon at the first counterpart meeting of the PAHRD Net have learnt with shock and outrage at the arbitrary arrest and detention of Zimbabwe's leading human rights lawyer **Mrs Beatrice Mtetwa** by the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) yesterday 17 March 2013 when she was trying to represent her client as a lawyer.

Mrs Mtetwa's arrest comes in the wake of a recent spate of increases in the systematic and widespread persecution of HRDs by the ZRP. The police conduct comes as the country is finalizing the adoption of a new constitution that provides for an array of fundamental rights and freedoms as constitutionally protected. The police conduct is not in sync with the aspirations of the Zimbabwe people as expressed in the yes vote to the new constitution at the just ended referendum.

“Of particular concern to us is that Mrs Beatrice Mtetwa as a distinguished lawyer from Southern Africa was arrested while doing her work as a lawyer. It is standard practice that lawyers should not be impeded in the conduct of their work.” stated **Corlett Letlojane** of HURISA the current advocacy focal point for PAHRD Net in Southern Africa.

The PAHRD Net salutes Mrs Mtetwa for her steadfast stand in defending the rights of others in Zimbabwe and is convinced that her spirit cannot be broken as a result of this harsh treatment that the ZRP is meeting on her.

The PAHRD Net urges the authorities in Zimbabwe to release Mrs. Mtetwa forthwith from her detention and prosecute those elements within the police force who have abused their office to wrongfully detain her.

The recent and ongoing crackdown on civil society in Zimbabwe is a cause for great concern to the PAHRD Net.

“It sends clear and worrying signals that the impending elections in Zimbabwe are likely to be held under very difficult circumstances for HRDs and the people of Zimbabwe. It is important that the SADC mediation team under President Zuma address this issue urgently to avoid Zimbabwe having another failed election” said **Hassan Shire**, the President of the PAHRD Net.

Finally the PAHD Net urges the government of Zimbabwe to fully comply with its obligations for the protection of HRDs as enshrined in international instruments that Zimbabwe has signed and ratified.

Hassan Shire Chairperson-PAHRD Net on behalf of the PAHRD Network comprising the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders network, the Central Africa Human Rights Defenders Network, the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, the West Africa Human Rights Defenders Network.