

Dear all,

Today is a sad Christmas for those who usually celebrate it.

Please see attached statement from Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights circulated last night. Even as we are relieved to hear that Jestina Mukoko (see earlier emails and circulars) and the others are alive, news of their extremely severe injuries at the hands of the government authorities is worrying. As you can see, the list includes a two year old.

But there is a silver lining: I just heard Metro FM (08h news) and other South African radio stations announce that the High Court ruled late last night that Jestina Mukoko and the 8 others be released to a hospital. Reasons were not made public but the lower court yesterday charged them for recruiting people for armed overthrow of the state. Difficult for any sane person to believe, of course.

I have been wondering what could have made the state to rush to court on Christmas eve to charge them, when the police had written a letter stating that they did not have them in their custody. Its clear from the attached press release that the Lawyers for HR's consistent and brave efforts unsettled the authorities, somehow.

We also suspect that Tsvangirai's Tuesday statement where he said he would withdraw from anything to do with the agreement (GPA) if the whereabouts of the abducted activists were not made known and if they were not released. [It worries me that the MDC leader is in Botswana while so much is happening in Zimbabwe that requires astute leadership but thats a discussion for another day.] All their ridiculous utterances notwithstanding, ZANU-PF is highly dependent on the continuation of that agreement. Many governments and organisations have announced they will not offer any assistance to the beleaguered Zimbabwe unless there is some form of government - some calling for a government envisaged by the agreement, while others refuse to have anything to do with a government that will include Robert Gabriel Mugabe.

Times are hard. Let us continue to put pressure for the release of Jestina Mukoko and all other Human Rights defenders, MDC activists and others who have been abducted, disappeared, detained in imprisons and elsewhere.

Khotso (peace) Bunie