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Zimbabwe: Judicial harassment against human rights defender Obert Masaraure

On 14 June 2022, human rights defender and president of the Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe, **Obert Masaraure**, was arrested at the Harare Central Police station. The human rights defender had gone to the police station as part of the conditions of his remand bail hearing for the [case](#) of treason and participating in a lawful teachers protest. Obert Masaraure has been charged with murder, in addition to the previous charges.

[Obert Masaraure](#) is the national president of the [Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe \(ARTUZ\)](#), which works to defend the labour rights of teachers and to protect schools, students and teachers from political interference and manipulation. He provides leadership and direction for the organization and leads networking and communication on behalf of the Union. ARTUZ is also the winner of the 2022 Front Line Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk for Africa. On 27 May 2022, Obert Masaraure received the award in Dublin on behalf of ARTUZ and travelled to Brussels for a series of meetings with EU officials after the Awards ceremony where he tweeted about many of the meetings, as did EU officials.

In June 2016, Obert Masaraure was participating in a workshop organized by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Organization (FES) and hosted at the Jameson Hotel in Zimbabwe. During this workshop, a youth activist and associate member of ARTUZ Roy Issa fell from the 7th floor of the hotel, losing his life. During the initial investigation into the incident, Obert Masaraure was not interrogated or considered a witness as he was not present at the hotel at the time of the unfortunate event. The case was heard by the Court Inquest in 2016 at Harare Magistrate Court and the court ruled out any form of foul play.

On 14 June 2022, Obert Masaraure was arrested and charged with the murder of Roy Issa when he went to the Harare Central Police station for his routine remand bail hearing. This arrest and charge comes a few days after Obert Masaraure received the award in Dublin and a few days before the peaceful protests ARTUZ planned to hold from the 20th to 24th of June. In addition to this, the defender reports that he had been warned by reliable sources that he would be arrested upon his return from Dublin. Obert Masaraure still faces a long list of charges including a charge of treason for “subverting a constitutionally elected government and inciting public violence” going back to 2019. The defender is currently at the High Court of Harare, the area surrounding the court is being cordoned off by heavily armed police and the public is barred from the court and the area around it. Obert Masaraure and ARTUZ have long been targeted for their peaceful work in defence of human right and labour rights.

The recent incident is part of a pattern of violations against ARTUZ and its members which started in December 2018 and have continued to escalate. These incidents come in a context of harassment and detentions committed against human rights defenders in Zimbabwe in reprisal for their work on the right to education in rural areas, labour and other civil rights.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the arbitrary detention, ill-treatment and judicial harassment of ARTUZ human rights defenders and believes that these measures are

solely motivated by their legitimate activities in defence of human rights. Front Line Defenders condemns the ongoing human rights violations by security agents and recognises them as part of an effort to clamp down on freedoms, specifically against human rights defenders fighting for the right to education in rural areas, labour and other civil rights in Zimbabwe.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities of Zimbabwe to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against Obert Masaraure, as it is believed that they are solely motivated by his legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Immediately and unconditionally release Obert Masaraure;
3. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Zimbabwe, and guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Zimbabwe are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.