

URGENT ACTION

FORMER MP'S CONVICTIONS MUST BE QUASHED

On 30 January 2024, former opposition leader Job Sikhala was released after 595 days of arbitrary detention. Job Sikhala was arrested on 14 June 2022 and convicted on 3 May 2023 for obstruction of justice and given a suspended six-month sentence with an option of paying US\$ 600 as fine. On 30 January 2024, he was convicted and sentenced to a suspended two-year prison term under a law that no longer exists after he was accused of posting a video on Facebook claiming that a police officer had killed a baby. The Zimbabwean authorities must immediately overturn Job Sikhala's convictions and sentence and stop weaponizing the criminal justice system to target, harass and intimidate opposition leaders.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

President of the Republic of Zimbabwe

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Email: info@opc.gov.zw

Your Excellency,

While I welcome his release from unlawful detention, I remain concerned about the continued harassment and intimidation of opposition member of parliament, **Job Sikhala** through the justice system.

Job Sikhala was arrested with fellow opposition leader **Godfrey Sithole** and 14 other men (collectively known as the '**Nyatsime 16**') on 14 June 2022. They were charged with 'obstructing justice' and 'incitement to commit violence and disorderly conduct'.

On 3 May 2023, Job Sikhala was convicted and fined for 'obstructing justice'. While a High Court ruling overturned the conviction in November 2023, Job Sikhala remained in prison during this time, awaiting trial for the incitement to commit violence and disorderly conduct charges. On 30 January, he received a suspended two-year prison sentence for incitement to commit violence and was subsequently released after 595 days of pretrial detention. On 15 February, Job Sikhala received a nine-month suspended prison sentence for charges of "false statements prejudicial to the state" - a law that no longer exists and was declared void by the Constitutional Court in 2014 - after he was accused of posting a video on Facebook claiming that a police officer had killed a baby. Meanwhile, Godfrey Sithole and the other 14 men in the 'Nyatsime 16' case were granted bail in November 2023 but the 14 men are due to stand trial on the politically motivated 'incitement to commit violence and disorderly conduct' charges. Godfrey Sithole was also convicted for incitement to commit violence and given a suspended two-year prison sentence.

I note the growing crackdown on human rights and attacks on activists and opposition politicians and suppression of dissenting views and believe that the charges against Job Sikhala are politically motivated charges as they are designed to silence him.

I call on you to ensure that convictions and sentence of Job Sikhala and Godfrey Sithole are immediately quashed and to end the intimidation and harassment against them and other opposition members and leaders. I also urge you to uphold the constitution and the country's international human rights obligations including by ensuring respect for the human rights of everyone. Additionally, I urge you to drop all charges against the other 14 men arrested with Sikhala and whose trial is ongoing.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 24 May 2022, Moreblessing Ali, an activist from the main opposition party Citizens' Coalition for Change (CCC), was abducted at Chibhanguza shopping centre in Nyatsime, Chitungwiza, a dormitory town, 22km from Harare, Zimbabwe's capital. The alleged abductor, identified by people at the shopping centre, was a well-known activist with the ruling ZANU PF party. On 11 June 2022, Moreblessing Ali's mutilated body was found dumped in a well at the home of a ZANU PF supporter. ZANU PF supporters quickly denied that Moreblessing Ali's abduction and murder was politically motivated, instead calling it a "relationship gone sour".

Job Sikhala, a CCC MP and lawyer, who has been arrested a total of 67 times on politically motivated charges led the search for Moreblessing Ali and was appointed by her family to be their lawyer. He mobilized calls for justice which supporters of the ZANU PF opposed. One ZANU PF councillor insisted that the mourners were not supposed to gather in Nyatsime to mourn Moreblessing Ali's death, despite Moreblessing Ali's home being in Nyatsime.

On 14 June 2022, during Moreblessing Ali's funeral, there were clashes between members of ZANU PF and the CCC which resulted in the destruction of property. Job Sikhala and Godfrey Sithole, another CCC member of parliament, were arrested and charged with 'incitement to commit violence or public violence' on the false basis that they had made utterances which incited violence and also that they supplied vehicles to ferry CCC supporters from the towns of Chitungwiza and Epworth to Nyatsime. If convicted, the offence carries a lengthy prison term often at the discretion of the magistrate. On 14 July, Job Sikhala was additionally charged with 'obstructing the course of justice' under section 184(1) (e) of the Criminal Reform and Codification Act, which carries a prison term not exceeding 6 months or a fine or both.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 7 MAY 2024

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Job Sikhala, Godfrey Sithole, Nyatsime 16 (All he/him/ his)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr46/6135/2022/en/>