



INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS

Commission internationale de juristes - Comisión Internacional de Juristas

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ICJ WARNS ZIMBABWE AGAINST INTERFERING WITH THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION IN ZIMBABWE

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The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) has today written to the Zimbabwe Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, Hon. Patrick Chinamasa expressing serious concern about recent developments in Zimbabwe which threaten to undermine the independence of lawyers. The ICJ was prompted to write the letter following statement against the Law Society of Zimbabwe made by the Minister Hon. Patrick Chinamasa in the *Herald* of 29th February 2008, a government controlled media.

"The ICJ takes these statements seriously not only because they are attributed to a government minister but additionally because he is the minister under whose docket government relations with the bar association falls. The statements take on an even more worrying dimension when looked at against the background of previous well documented attacks against lawyers in Zimbabwe" said Martin Masiga of the ICJ Africa Programme

The ICJ is deeply concern that this governmental declaration against the Law Society of Zimbabwe could be a prelude to a new regime of government actions aimed at discrediting, delegitimising and undermining the independence of the legal profession in Zimbabwe. The ICJ called the Minister to take measures that will restore the integrity of the law society so that they can focus on their legitimate activities.

Attacks on lawyers in Zimbabwe have included physical assaults, manhandling, office raids and seizure of documents, arbitrary arrests and detentions, false prosecutions, being chased out of police stations, being threatened with arrest when representing clients among others.

The ICJ reminded the government of Zimbabwe of its obligations as a State Party to the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights* as well as a variety of human rights instruments, to ensure that lawyers are able to perform all their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference. "We urged the government of Zimbabwe to desist from taking any measures that undermine the independence of the legal profession, and to respect and implement all its international obligations with regard to creating an environment for the free and dignified practice of the legal profession and prevalence of the rule of law in Zimbabwe" said Martin Masiga of the ICJ.

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The ICJ is an international non-governmental organisation comprising sixty of the world's most eminent jurists and has a worldwide network of national sections and affiliated organisations

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