

NEWSLETTER FROM CATHY BUCKLE IN ZIMBABWE



Prisoners and the full moon

25 July 2024



Dear Family and Friends,

Walking past a small dam where the remaining water was just a muddy stagnant pool, a big bird lifted up into a leafless tree. The beautiful Purple Heron sat very still watching me, it is not a common bird around here and was the perfect reason to stop and watch and let the beauty of Zimbabwe soak in. Summer is nearly here, the trees have started losing their leaves which are running on our roofs, whispering in the wind and drifting down to carpet the ground, nature's mulch protecting the earth from the hot, dry months just moments away.

In three weeks time the SADC Summit is taking place in Harare and our government is on a massive spending spree to paper over the visible, palpable crisis in our country. A huge eight-lane highway has been constructed out to Zimbabwe's new parliament in Mount Hampden. A pristine highway with palm trees planted down the centre like some exotic tropical resort which belies the disastrous, treacherous state of internal roads all over Zimbabwe which are covered with potholes, gullies and steep cut-away verges.

Media reports say the government of Zimbabwe has spent over US\$200 million in preparations for the SADC Summit which takes place on the 17th and 18th of August. It is tragically ironic that our government has spent 200 million dollars on just preparing for a two-day Summit at a time when more than half of our population is going to bed hungry and lining up for international food aid. Will SADC leaders see through this window dressing?

More tragic is that there are still 78 young people in prison in Harare. Known as the Avondale 78, they were arrested when they attended a gathering to commemorate the Day of the African Child at the home of opposition politician and former Senator, Jameson Timba. Traumatized, beaten, brutalized and physically wounded at the hands of police whilst in custody, the recent bail hearing for the Avondale 78 was again denied. They have been in what is called 'pre-trial detention' since their arrest on the 16th June.

Thirty-nine days in detention at the time of writing, these youngsters are but pawns in a time of political window dressing, out of sight is out of mind, until after the SADC Summit. Zimbabwean NGO the Heal Zimbabwe Trust said: "The case of 78 incarcerated opposition supporters has all the signs of political persecution and we call for their release. We beseech all Zimbabweans to join and amplify the call for their release."

Yesterday 60 ZINASU (Zimbabwe National Students' Union) leaders were beaten and arrested by Police in Harare where they were holding a meeting at the ZESA Training Centre. Zimbabwean journalist Hopewell Chin'ono posted the news on social meeting along with a photograph of the injuries inflicted on one young man. Mr Chin'ono wrote: "It is crucial that the world bears witness to these human rights abuses."

Since my last Letter from Zimbabwe lawyer and former Zengeza West opposition MP Job Sikhala was finally acquitted by the High Court on the spurious charges against him since 2022. This week he wrote: "For 595 days I was thrown into solitary confinement shackled in chains like a terrorist and suffered the most horrible abuse any person can endure. I told everyone who would listen that I did not commit any crime in my professional responsibility to represent the Moreblessing Ali family." Mr Sikhala's claims of innocence have finally been listened to and his acquittal is long overdue.

Mr Sikhala was a high-profile political prisoner, the Avondale 78 are not, please keep them in your thoughts and prayers and join in our call for their release. As I started to compile this Letter From Zimbabwe during the full moon I couldn't help but think about those 78 youngsters in pre-trial detention. It is the second full moon since they have been in prison and I wondered if they will they be leaders themselves one day or human rights advocates standing up for your rights or mine? I hope the light of the moon gave them a moment of comfort and hope in this their time of pain and anguish.

There is no charge for this Letter From Zimbabwe but if you would like to donate please visit my website. Until next time, thanks for reading this Letter From Zimbabwe now in its 24th year, and my books about life in Zimbabwe, a country in waiting.

Ndini shamwari yenyu (I am your friend)

Love Cathy

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