

“What does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” Micah 6 v 8

LETTER FROM BEN FREETH



Advocate Fadzayi Mahere

Dear Friends

In the struggles of 2021 all over the world, I want to share a story of a friend and very brave young lawyer in Zimbabwe.

I have known Fadzayi Mahere for the last decade and more, when she took her first tentative steps as a lawyer defending human rights in the dark world of the Zimbabwe justice system.

I visited her when she went on and worked at the International Criminal Court in The Hague - but then came home to Zimbabwe to face the horrors of being at the receiving end of the abuse herself.

I have often stood or sat silently in solidarity with her whilst she stood in the dock in the labyrinth of Kafkaesque trials. She is a person of great integrity and she writes with such feeling of her most recent trial - which is the trial of so many Zimbabweans. Please take a moment and read this. Amazingly, it brings hope. In a country where there is so much destruction and poverty and injustice, we need hope.

Nobody can fully understand the fear that grips you in a place like Zimbabwe when people in unmarked cars and in civilian dress arrive at your home on the weekend and want to see you, except when it happens to you.

“Courage does not mean you aren’t afraid. It means you act in spite of your fear,” Fadzayi says.

She had sent out tweets protesting police brutality. A video of a crowd of very upset people protesting with a policeman who had evidently just bludgeoned a baby on its mother’s back had recently done the rounds on social media.

Fadzayi had protested police brutality as any person with any feeling would. In Zimbabwe though, protesting police brutality gets met with persecution.

Fadzayi waited out the interminable weekend, expecting the men to return. “I waited for what seemed like an eternity,” she said.

On the Monday she went to the police station with our mutual friend and hero, David Drury. He is another lawyer who truly cares for the victims of injustice. They were told that rather than go to court she was to be immediately taken to the cells.

“I was thrown into the all-familiar lice-infested police cell. The puddle of urine from last time and all the times before greeted me. Rather it slapped me in the face. I was barefoot as per entry procedure. There was no sanitizer, no facility to flush the loo (the loo in the cell has no privacy), no sink and tap, no toilet paper and no sanitary bin. The blankets smelt of old urine. I shared the cell with 6 others. We talked and lay down on the concrete floor.” There are no beds in Zimbabwe cells.

“The next day I was bundled into the back of a police truck escorted by nine police officers who breathed on each other and breathed on me.”

An application was made for her release but the magistrate decided Fadzayi needed to be transferred to Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison.

“The events of the previous 2 days had frozen my legal brain as I watched constitutional rights bludgeoned and the supreme law rendered a lifeless museum piece. I resolved that the only way to make it through this ordeal was to embrace it and follow all orders. “Behave with beauty and dignity at all times” is the best advice I received. We knelt before the prison wardens. They stripped us of all clothing and our bras and then handed us our green prison garb. I had prison number 38/21.”

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“We were placed in an isolation cell with no window. A container with the top cut off was placed in the corner of the room for us to relieve ourselves. Breakfast was watery porridge. Spoons were forbidden.”

She was then moved to another cell where most of the prisoners were convicted murderers wearing their yellow prison uniforms.

“I made many friends because humanity is wired towards positivity. People in distress tend to make the most of tough situations, united by our basic human instincts that want dignity, freedom, community and progress. “Story after story made me reflect on my own personal circumstances and feel grateful for God’s many mercies.”

I lived for visiting time. I’d stand lifeless at the window of my cell staring at the gate. My trusted lawyer came every day. He is a lawyer of immense distinction, integrity and honour. I nearly shed a tear when he pledged his own title deeds as he moved my bail application.”

“Every day at lock-up time I watched the quiet beauty of the setting sun descending below the horizon. It was a peaceful reminder that the whole thing would eventually end. At least I hoped.”

When Fadzayi was eventually given bail, she “stepped out of the prison truck and knelt before the prison wardens one last time crying internal tears of joy that the sun had finally set on this ordeal”.

Fadzayi’s trial, like so many others, will continue. What inspires me is that she does not despair. Instead she has hope:

“I remain hopeful that one day the sun will set on injustice and repression. Until then I will choose courage over inaction. I will never stop imagining that Zimbabwe will one day be free. Ours must always be a story of hope.”

We ask each one of you to continue to try to be part of that story of hope - even in the most hopeless jails. Thank you all for all your prayers for Fadzayi and so many like her.

Shortly after this prison spell, Fadzayi went down with Covid - undoubtedly from the prison. The hospitals are all but useless in Zimbabwe now; but she is recovering well.

Please keep praying; keep hoping; keep finding courage over inaction.

The fight for justice and property rights and indeed freedom, is a long, hard and often lonely fight; but please take heart and find strength on whatever difficult road you are each on in these trying times. Take heart from the stories of brave people like Fadzayi.

Thank you so much for your loyalty to this long and difficult journey in Zimbabwe. We are so grateful for your prayers, and for your financial support. We couldn't do what we do without you.

May God's blessing be on each one of you.

With love



Ben Freeth

Executive Director

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