



**LAWYERS COMMITTEE  
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August 22, 2002

**Mr. Robert Mugabe**  
President

**Mr. Patrick Chinamasa**  
Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs

**c/o H.E. Dr. Simbi V. Mubako**  
Embassy of Zimbabwe  
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Dear Sirs,

On behalf of the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, I would like to once again express serious concern about human rights and the rule of law in Zimbabwe. The Lawyers Committee, a US-based non-governmental organization, has written to you already this year, urging respect for the rule of law in Zimbabwe and an end to violence and intimidation by your government and supporters against judges and lawyers in the country.

We were disturbed to learn this week of yet another attack on legal practitioners in Zimbabwe, namely the physical assault of a magistrate in Chipinge and the destruction of property belonging to an attorney in Chipinge. It appears that the attack on Mr. Walter Chikwanha was launched by a group of war veterans in retaliation for the fulfillment of his duties as a magistrate. Mr. Langton Mhungu, a local lawyer, was then pursued by the same group, who vandalized his car in apparent retaliation for his representation of clients belonging to the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

The reported attack on magistrate Walter Chikwanha by agents associated with your government is an extremely serious violation of human rights in itself. As a public attack carried out in direct relation to a magistrate's functions, the incident further represents a direct assault on the principles of judicial independence and the rule of law. The Lawyers Committee and other organizations have previously identified a pattern of attacks upon members of the Zimbabwean judiciary which appear designed to ensure judicial support for government policies and action by punishing dissenters--or forcing their departure from the judiciary. The assault of Mr. Chikwana provides further evidence of this pattern.

In addition, the targeting of lawyers for carrying out their professional duties and advocacy of human rights constitutes a serious violation of basic rights protected under

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international law. Recent incidents of this kind in Zimbabwe are in violation of international treaties to which Zimbabwe is party.

Once again, we call upon you to ensure that all judges and lawyers in Zimbabwe are able to perform their professional duties independently and without fear of retaliation. We request that the perpetrators of attacks on judges and lawyers, including Mr. Chikwana and Mr. Mhangu, be held accountable for their actions and that adequate measures are taken to ensure the safety of legal practitioners. The Lawyers Committee will continue to monitor the situation in Zimbabwe closely and advocate for respect for human rights and the restoration of the rule of law.

Sincerely,

Michael McClintock  
Director of Program