

Civil society deeply concerned about attack on Mozambique human rights defender and threats to press freedom in Mozambique

3 April 2018

It is with sadness that the undersigned civil society organisations express deep concern about the attack on Mozambique human rights defender, Ericino de Salema, which took place in Maputo on 27th March 2018. Mr Salema, a journalist, a rights activist and political analyst was allegedly kidnapped by unknown gunmen in the country's capital city. Reportedly, these men had been following Salema when they took him by surprise after he entered his car parked alongside the *Avenida 24 de Julho* in the Maputo city centre. Salema did not offer any resistance to his attackers.

The kidnappers took Salema to the Mutanhane area in the Marracuene suburb on the outskirts of Maputo. The attackers beat the victim severely. Moreover, it is alleged that they tried to break his legs and left him with serious injuries. Some school children who witnessed the incident reported it to fellow citizens who came to Salema's rescue. Salema was taken to a private hospital in Maputo where he is receiving treatment. He remains in a critical condition. Salema has been consistent in denouncing the abuse of power by the ruling political elite in Mozambique. Most recently, he criticised the government of Mozambique over hidden public debt which is likely to cost the country millions of American dollars. It is believed that the money benefitted senior politicians in the country's ruling party, FRELIMO. Salema also raised concerns about impunity of certain class citizens including family members of the country's President.

This is not the first time a journalist or human rights defender has come under attack in Mozambique. Three years ago, in March 2015, Gilles Cistac, a Senior Professor of Law at the Eduardo Mondlane University, was shot and killed seemingly as a result of political factors. Professor Cistac's death came shortly after he made pronouncements over the country's disputed decentralisation process. Decentralisation has been a controversial issue that fuelled conflict between the ruling party, FRELIMO, and the main opposition, RENAMO. This incident occurred within the context where RENAMO claimed it had the right to rule in provinces where it had won the majority of votes. This was in response to allegations of vote rigging by FRELIMO. In 2016, Jaime Macuiane, a political analyst was brutally attacked over alleged pronouncements he made regarding the political situation in the country.

Whereas the undersigned civil society groups do not attribute responsibility over these occurrences to any political party, the government bears responsibility to investigate and hold accountable the perpetrators. The current attack against Salema is an affront to Mozambique's obligations under international human rights law instruments. Mozambique is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It is also a signatory to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. These instruments contain provisions compelling State parties to take measures to protect the right to freedom of opinion, freedom of expression and the security of persons of their citizens. As a State party Mozambique is required to protect these rights.

Globally, the protection of human rights defenders and the right to freedom of expression and opinion are regarded as cornerstones for human right protection. In cognisance of this fact the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, which monitors the implementation of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, established in 2004 a Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in Africa (HRD SP). In 2011, the Commission adopted the Cotonou Declaration on Strengthening and expanding the protection of All Human Rights Defenders in Africa'. The Commission has also adopted

critical standards speaking to the right to freedom of expression and assembly. Mozambique is well aware of these standards and of their obligations. We call upon the government of Mozambique to:

- i. Investigate and take measures to hold accountable perpetrators involved in attacks against Mr Ericino de Salema and other Mozambique human rights defenders;
- ii. Take steps to mitigate and prevent future attacks against human rights defenders including through the adoption of a dedicated laws protecting human rights defenders in the country,
- iii. Respect freedom of expression, association and assembly in Mozambique particularly with regard to the media and in respect of Human Rights Defenders, and take measures to address violations of these rights.

Signed by:

1. Southern Africa Litigation Centre (SALC), Southern Africa
2. CHISA, Malawi
3. BLOGGERS OF ZAMBIA, Zambia
4. Human Rights Centre, Somaliland
5. WoMin African Alliance
6. Centre for Human Rights Education Advice and Assistance (CHREAA), Malawi
7. CIVICUS
8. Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, USA
9. Ladder for Rural Development Organization, Malawi
10. Human Rights Institute of South Africa (HURISA), South Africa
11. Legal Assistance Centre, Namibia
12. Human Rights First Rwanda Association, Rwanda
13. WLSA MOZAMBIQUE, Mozambique
14. Corruption Watch, South Africa
15. Institute for human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA), Gambia
16. Southern African Christian Initiative, Namibia
17. Namibia Media Trust (NMT), Namibia
18. Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA),
19. Child Rights Advocacy & Paralegal Aid Centre (CRAPAC), Malawi
20. Khulumani Support Group, South Africa
21. Prevention Information et Lutte Contre le Sida (PILCS), Mauritius
22. Centre for Youth Empowerment and Civic Education (CYECE), Malawi
23. Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR), South Africa
24. Centre for Girls and Interaction (CEGI), Malawi
25. African Youth Safe Abortion Alliance (AYOSA)
26. Action for Southern Africa (ACTSA), United Kingdom
27. Africa Freedom of Information Centre, Uganda
28. Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP), Nigeria
29. Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, Zimbabwe
30. Associação Justiça, Paz e Democracia (AJPD), Angola
31. Poverty Reduction Network (PORENet), Mozambique
32. African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS), Uganda
33. Paralegal Advisory Service Institute,
34. Amnesty International
35. International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), Southern Africa
36. MISA, South Africa

37. #UniteBehind, South Africa
38. Legal Resources Centre, South Africa
39. POSITIVE-GENERATION, Cameroon
40. MANGO Network, Malawi
41. Zambia Council for Social Development (ZCSD), Zambia
42. Centro de Estudos Moçambicanos e Internacionais (CEMO), Mozambique
43. Southern African Human Rights Defenders Network
44. Media Monitoring Africa, South Africa