



LAW SOCIETY
OF SOUTH AFRICA

PRESS RELEASE

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**LAW SOCIETY CONDEMNS ARREST OF ZIMBABWEAN LAWYER BEATRICE
MTETWA**

The Law Society of South Africa (LSSA) condemns the arrest of prominent Zimbabwean human rights lawyer Beatrice Mtetwa in Harare on Sunday, 17 March 2013.

It appears that Ms Mtetwa – a former President of the Law Society of Zimbabwe and a member of the Council of the SADC Lawyers Association – was arrested on allegations of obstructing or defeating the course of justice. The arrest came after Ms Mtetwa rendered legal assistance to Thabani Mpfu, the Director of Research and Development in Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's Office. Mr Mpfu's residence was raided and searched early Sunday morning. Ms Mtetwa was taken to Harare Central Police Station with her client by the Zimbabwean police.

'Lawyers must be free to exercise their profession without fear of arrest or harassment. Arrest, such as in the case of Ms Mtetwa, violates the fundamental principle of the independence of the legal profession,' say LSSA Co-Chairpersons Krish Govender and Jan Stemmett. Her arrest also represents an infringement of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, which state that 'Governments shall ensure that lawyers are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference and that lawyers shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognised professional duties, standards and ethics'.

Ms Mtetwa is scheduled to chair a session at the 18th Commonwealth Law Conference in Cape Town next month. The session – *Lawyers on the Frontline* – will focus on lawyers being harassed and persecuted for performing their professional duties and promoting and protecting the human rights of their clients.

The LSSA calls on the Zimbabwean Government and its police force to release Ms Mtetwa as a matter of urgency. The steps that the Zimbabwean Government is taking to advance its stature in the world will be compromised by actions which undermine the Rule of Law further.

ISSUED ON BEHALF OF THE CO-CHAIRPERSONS OF THE LAW SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA, KRISH GOVENDER AND JAN STEMMETT

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Editor's note:

The Law Society of South Africa brings together its six constituent members – the Cape Law Society, the KwaZulu-Natal Law Society, the Law Society of the Free State, the Law Society of the Northern Provinces, the Black Lawyers Association and the National Association of Democratic Lawyers – in representing South Africa's 21 400 attorneys and 5 800 candidate attorneys.