

MEDIA STATEMENT
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**No Freedom after Expression for Zimbabwean Filmmaker Tsitsi Dangarembga
and her ally.**

Convicted over a peaceful placard protest, Zimbabwe's renowned filmmaker and activist Tsitsi Dangarembga has been treated like a common criminal for nothing other than exercising her right to freedom of expression.

On Friday July 31, 2020, Dangarembga and her friend Julie Barnes walked down the streets of Zimbabwean capital, Harare holding up placards that called for political reform in the country and demanded better services. The duo were arrested and held overnight in police custody with no formal charges laid against them. The next day, they were charged with inciting public violence and violating Covid-19 regulations. They were eventually released on bail, followed by a prolonged trial of over two years. On 29 September 2022, Dangarembga and Barnes were handed a suspended six-month jail sentence and a fine of around US\$120. According to the Harare Magistrate, Dangarembga and her ally could have caused a breach of peace had other people joined in their protest.

The conviction is a clear indication of the extent to which the Zimbabwean government will go to crush dissent in the country. The right to a peaceful protest is protected under the Zimbabwean constitution and in other international human rights instruments that the country has ratified, but it would appear that citizens have these rights in name only as there are serious consequences to be suffered for speaking out against the ruling party, Zanu-PF. Quoted in an interview with the BBC, following her conviction, Dangarembga said, "The space for freedom of expression and freedom of the media is shrinking and increasingly criminalised". She added that she will be appealing against the judgement.

The Campaign for Free Expression (CFE) is in full support of her decision. We demand justice for Dangarembga and others like her who have fallen victim to a repressive state with no citizens' interests at heart. CFE stands firmly with Dangarembga and Barnes in support of their freedom. The conviction of the duo at such a time is calculated to instil fear in citizens and discourage any form of protest leading up to the elections. We call upon the African Commission on Human and People's Rights to intervene and stop the closing of civic space in the country as it heads for elections in 2023. The Southern African Development Community needs to stop playing 'comradeship' with the Zimbabwean government and call a spade a spade. When citizens peacefully protest to demand better livelihoods and accountability from government, it should not be a crime.

The Campaign for Free Expression (CFE) is a non-partisan, non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and expanding the right to free expression for ALL and enabling EVERYONE to exercise this right to the full, whether it by speaking out, by protesting, by revealing information,

by blowing the whistle on wrong-doing, by arguing, debating, writing, painting, composing or just by shouting out an opinion.

To become a friend of CFE and join the fight to demand justice for Dangarembga and to defend the right to freedom of expression in Southern Africa, sign up for our newsletter below to stay informed on our activities.

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